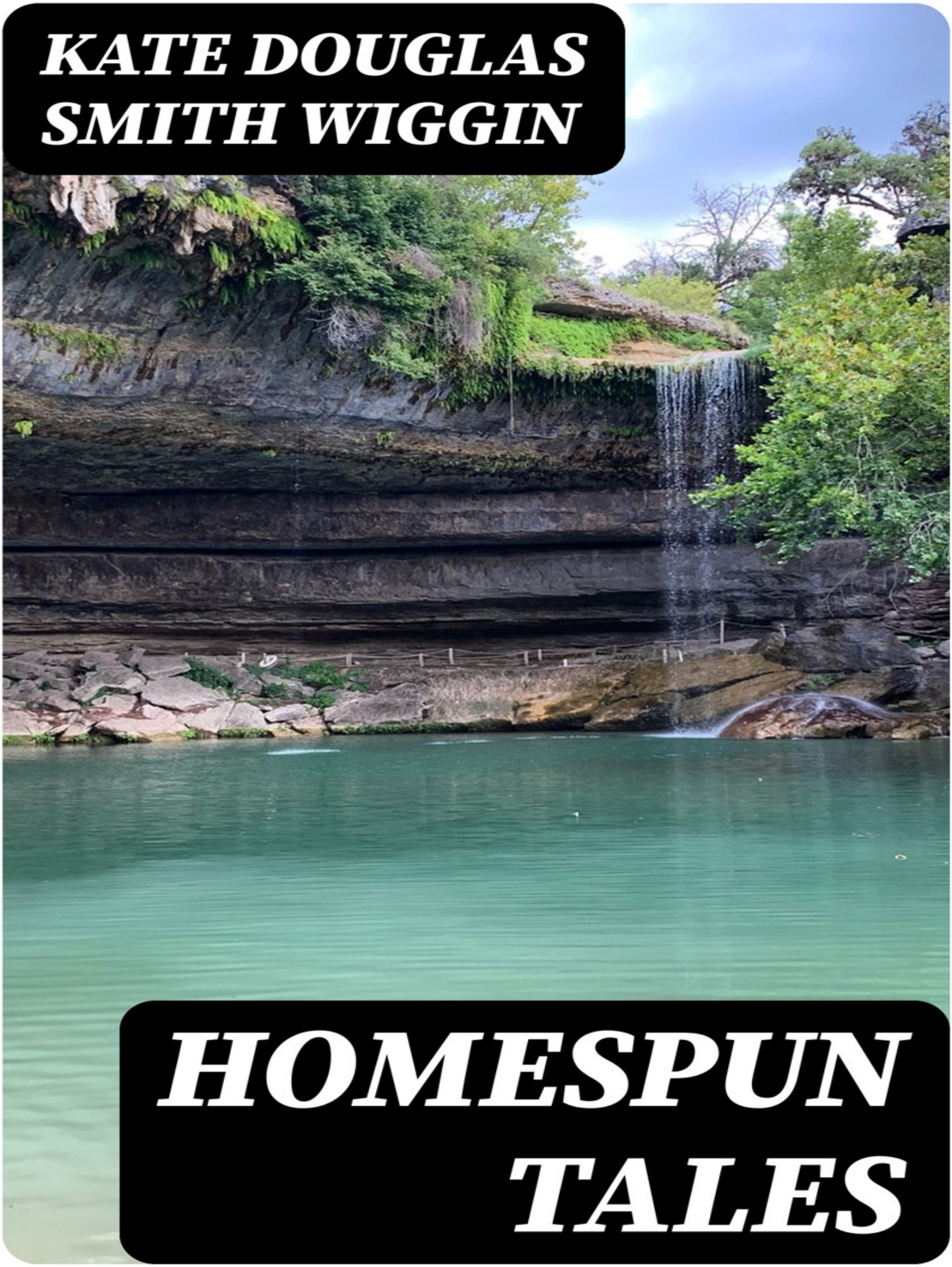
KATE DOUGLAS SMITH WIGGIN



HOMESPUN TALES

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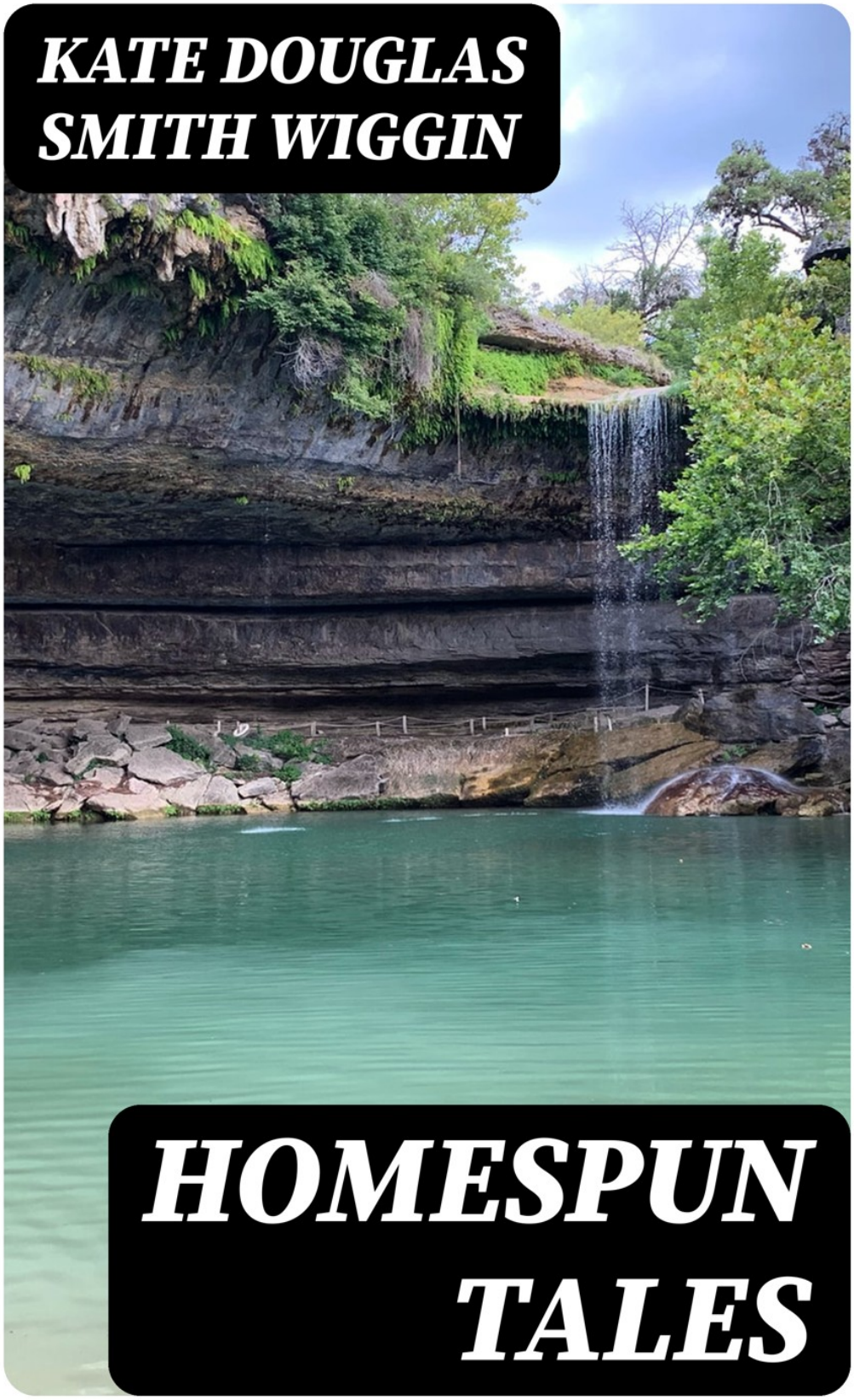

HOMESPUN TALES

Kate Douglas Smith Wiggin

Homespun Tales

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Introduction

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These three stories are now brought together under one cover because they have not quite outworn their welcome; but in their first estate two of them appeared as gift-books, with decorative borders and wide margins, a style not compatible with the stringent economies of the present moment. Luckily they belong together by reason of their background, which is an imaginary village, any village you choose, within the confines, or on the borders of York County, in the State of Maine.

In the first tale the river, not “Rose,” is the principal character; no one realizes this better than I. If an author spends her summers on the banks of Saco Water it fills the landscape. It flows from the White Mountains to the Atlantic in a tempestuous torrent, breaking here and there into glorious falls of amber glimpsed through snowy foam; its rapids dash through rocky cliffs crowned with pine trees, under which blue harebells and rosy columbines blossom in gay profusion. There is the glint of the mirror-like lake above the falls, and the sound of the surging floods below; the witchery of feathery elms reflected in its clear surfaces, and the enchantment of the full moon on its golden torrents, never twice alike and always beautiful! How is one to forget, evade, scorn, belittle it, by leaving its charms untold; and who could keep such a river out of a book? It has flowed through many of mine and the last sound I expect to hear in life will be the faint, far-away murmur of Saco Water!

The old Tory Hill Meeting House bulks its way into the foreground of the next story, and the old Peabody Pew (which never existed) has somehow assumed a quasi-historical aspect never intended by its author. There is a Dorcas Society, and there is a meeting house; my dedication assures the reader of these indubitable facts; and the Dorcas Society, in a season of temporary bankruptcy, succeeding a too ample generosity, did scrub the pews when there was no money for paint. Rumors of our strenuous, and somewhat unique, activities spread through our parish to many others, traveling so far (even over seas) that we became embarrassed at our easily won fame. The book was read and people occasionally came to church to see the old Peabody Pew, rather resenting the information that there had never been any Peabodys in the parish and, therefore, there could be no Peabody Pew. Matters became worse when I made, very reverently, what I suppose must be called a dramatic version of the book, which we have played for several summers in the old meeting house to audiences far exceeding our seating capacity. Inasmuch as the imaginary love-tale of my so-called Nancy Wentworth and Justin Peabody had begun under the shadow of the church steeple, and after the ten years of parting the happy reunion had come to them in the selfsame place, it was possible to present their story simply and directly, without offense, in a church building. There was no curtain, no stage, no scenery, no theatricalism. The pulpit was moved back, and four young pine trees were placed in front of it for supposed Christmas decoration. The pulpit platform, and the “wing pews” left vacant for the village players, took the

place of a stage; the two aisles served for exits and entrances; and the sexton with three rings of the church bell, announced the scenes. The Carpet Committee of the Dorcas Society furnished the exposition of the first act, while sewing the last breadths of the new, hardly-bought ingrain carpet. The scrubbing of the pews ends the act, with dialogue concerning men, women, ministers, church-members and their ways, including the utter failure of Justin Peabody, Nancy's hero, to make a living anywhere, even in the West. The Dorcas members leave the church for their Saturday night suppers of beans and brown bread, but Nancy returns with her lantern at nightfall to tack down the carpet in the old Peabody pew and iron out the tattered, dog's eared leaves of the hymn-book from which she has so often sung “By cool Siloam's shady rill” with her lover in days gone by. He, still a failure, having waited for years for his luck to turn, has come back to spend Christmas in the home of his boyhood; and seeing a dim light in the church, he enters quietly and surprises Nancy at her task of carpeting the Peabody Pew, so that it shall look as well as the others at next day's services. The rest is easy to imagine. One can deny the reality of a book, but when two or three thousand people have beheld Justin Peabody and Nancy Wentworth in the flesh, and have seen the paint of the old Peabody Pew wiped with a damp cloth, its cushion darned and its carpet tacked in place, it is useless to argue; any more than it would be to deny the validity of the egg of Columbus or the apple of William Tell.

As for “Susanna and Sue” the story would never have been written had I not as a child and girl been driven once a

year to the Shaker meeting at the little village of Alfred, sixteen miles distant. The services were then open to the public, but eventually permission to attend them was withdrawn, because of the careless and sometimes irreverent behavior of young people who regarded the Shaker costumes, the solemn dances or marches, the rhythmic movements of the hands, the almost hypnotic crescendo of the singing, as a sort of humorous spectacle. I learned to know the brethren and sisters, and the Elder, as years went by, and often went to the main house to spend a day or two as the guest of Eldress Harriet, a saint, if ever there was one, or, later, with dear Sister Lucinda.

The shining cleanliness and order, the frugality and industry, the serenity and peace of these people, who had resigned the world and “life on the plane of Adam,” vowing themselves to celibacy, to public confession of sins, and the holding of goods in common,—all this has always had a certain exquisite and helpful influence upon my thought, and Mr. W. D. Howells paid a far more beautiful tribute to them in “The Undiscovered Country.”

It is needless to say that I read every word of the book to my Shaker friends before it was published. They took a deep interest in it, evincing keen delight in my rather facetious but wholly imaginary portrait of “Brother Ansel,” a “born Shaker,” and sadly confessing that my two young lovers, “Hetty” and “Nathan,” who could not endure the rigors of the Shaker faith and fled together in the night to marry and join the world's people,—that this tragedy had often occurred in their community.

Here, then, are the three simple homespun tales. I believe they are true to life as I see it. I only wish my readers might hear the ripple of the Maine river running through them; breathe the fragrance of New England forests, and though never for a moment getting, through my poor pen, the atmosphere of Maine's rugged cliffs and the tang of her salt sea air, they might at least believe for an instant that they had found a modest Mayflower in her pine woods.

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN. July, 1920.

ROSE O' THE RIVER

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I. The Pine And the Rose

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It was not long after sunrise, and Stephen Waterman, fresh from his dip in the river, had scrambled up the hillside from the hut in the alder-bushes where he had made his morning toilet.

An early ablution of this sort was not the custom of the farmers along the banks of the Saco, but the Waterman house was hardly a stone's throw from the water, and there was a clear, deep swimming-hole in the Willow Cove that would have tempted the busiest man, or the least cleanly, in York County. Then, too, Stephen was a child of the river, born, reared, schooled on its very brink, never happy unless he were on it, or in it, or beside it, or at least within sight or sound of it.

The immensity of the sea had always silenced and overawed him, left him cold in feeling. The river wooed him, caressed him, won his heart. It was just big enough to love. It was full of charms and changes, of varying moods and sudden surprises. Its voice stole in upon his ear with a melody far sweeter and more subtle than the boom of the ocean. Yet it was not without strength, and when it was swollen with the freshets of the spring and brimming with the bounty of its sister streams, it could dash and roar, boom and crash, with the best of them.

Stephen stood on the side porch, drinking in the glory of the sunrise, with the Saco winding like a silver ribbon through the sweet loveliness of the summer landscape.

And the river rolled on toward the sea, singing its morning song, creating and nourishing beauty at every step of its onward path. Cradled in the heart of a great mountain-range, it pursued its gleaming way, here lying silent in glassy lakes, there rushing into tinkling little falls, foaming great falls, and thundering cataracts. Scores of bridges spanned its width, but no steamers flurried its crystal depths. Here and there a rough little rowboat, tethered to a

willow, rocked to and fro in some quiet bend of the shore. Here the silver gleam of a rising perch, chub, or trout caught the eye; there a pickerel lay rigid in the clear water, a fish carved in stone: here eels coiled in the muddy bottom of some pool; and there, under the deep shadows of the rocks, lay fat, sleepy bass, old, and incredibly wise, quite untempted by, and wholly superior to, the rural fisherman's worm.

The river lapped the shores of peaceful meadows; it flowed along banks green with maple, beech, sycamore, and birch; it fell tempestuously over dams and fought its way between rocky cliffs crowned with stately firs. It rolled past forests of pine and hemlock and spruce, now gentle, now terrible; for there is said to be an Indian curse upon the Saco, whereby, with every great sun, the child of a paleface shall be drawn into its cruel depths. Lashed into fury by the stony reefs that impeded its progress, the river looked now sapphire, now gold, now white, now leaden gray; but always it was hurrying, hurrying on its appointed way to the sea.

After feasting his eyes and filling his heart with a morning draught of beauty, Stephen went in from the porch and, pausing at the stairway, called in stentorian tones: “Get up and eat your breakfast, Rufus! The boys will be picking the side jams today, and I'm going down to work on the logs. If you come along, bring your own pick-pole and peavey.” Then, going to the kitchen pantry, he collected, from the various shelves, a pitcher of milk, a loaf of bread, half an apple pie, and a bowl of blueberries, and, with the easy methods of a household unswayed by feminine rule, moved toward a seat under an apple tree and took his morning

meal in great apparent content. Having finished, and washed his dishes with much more thoroughness than is common to unsuperintended man, and having given Rufus the second call to breakfast with the vigor and acrimony that usually mark that unpleasant performance, he strode to a high point on the riverbank and, shading his eyes with his hand, gazed steadily downstream.

Patches of green fodder and blossoming potatoes melted into soft fields that had been lately mown, and there were glimpses of tasseling corn rising high to catch the sun. Far, far down on the opposite bank of the river was the hint of a brown roof, and the tip of a chimney that sent a slender wisp of smoke into the clear air. Beyond this, and farther back from the water, the trees apparently hid a cluster of other chimneys, for thin spirals of smoke ascended here and there. The little brown roof could never have revealed itself to any but a lover's eye; and that discerned something even smaller, something like a pinkish speck, that moved hither and thither on a piece of greensward that sloped to the waterside.

“She's up!” Stephen exclaimed under his breath, his eyes shining, his lips smiling. His voice had a note of hushed exaltation about it, as if “she,” whoever she might be, had, in condescending to rise, conferred a priceless boon upon a waiting universe. If she were indeed “up” (so his tone implied), then the day, somewhat falsely heralded by the sunrise, had really begun, and the human race might pursue its appointed tasks, inspired and uplifted by the consciousness of her existence. It might properly be grateful for the fact of her birth; that she had grown to woman's

estate; and, above all, that, in common with the sun, the lark, the morning-glory, and other beautiful things of the early day, she was up and about her lovely, cheery, heart-warming business.

The handful of chimneys and the smoke-spirals rising here and there among the trees on the river-bank belonged to what was known as the Brier Neighborhood. There were only a few houses in all, scattered along a side road leading from the river up to Liberty Center. There were no great signs of thrift or prosperity, but the Wiley cottage, the only one near the water, was neat and well cared for, and Nature had done her best to conceal man's indolence, poverty, or neglect.

Bushes of sweetbrier grew in fragrant little forests as tall as the fences. Clumps of wild roses sprang up at every turn, and over all the stone walls, as well as on every heap of rocks by the wayside, prickly blackberry vines ran and clambered and clung, yielding fruit and thorns impartially to the neighborhood children.

The pinkish speck that Stephen Waterman had spied from his side of the river was Rose Wiley of the Brier Neighborhood on the Edgewood side. As there was another of her name on Brigadier Hill, the Edgewood minister called one of them the climbing Rose and the other the brier Rose, or sometimes Rose of the river. She was well named, the pinkish speck. She had not only some of the sweetest attributes of the wild rose, but the parallel might have been extended as far as the thorns, for she had wounded her scores,—hearts, be it understood, not hands. The wounding was, on the whole, very innocently done; and if fault could

be imputed anywhere, it might rightly have been laid at the door of the kind powers who had made her what she was, since the smile that blesses a single heart is always destined to break many more.

She had not a single silk gown, but she had what is far better, a figure to show off a cotton one. Not a brooch nor a pair of earrings was numbered among her possessions, but any ordinary gems would have looked rather dull and trivial when compelled to undergo comparison with her bright eyes. As to her hair, the local milliner declared it impossible for Rose Wiley to get an unbecoming hat; that on one occasion, being in a frolicsome mood, Rose had tried on all the headgear in the village emporium,—children's gingham “Shakers,” mourning bonnets for aged dames, men's haying hats and visored caps,—and she proved superior to every test, looking as pretty as a pink in the best ones and simply ravishing in the worst. In fact, she had been so fashioned and finished by Nature that, had she been set on a revolving pedestal in a show-window, the bystanders would have exclaimed, as each new charm came into view: “Look at her waist! See her shoulders! And her neck and chin! And her hair!” While the children, gazing with raptured admiration, would have shrieked, in unison, “I choose her for mine.”

All this is as much as to say that Rose of the river was a beauty, yet it quite fails to explain, nevertheless, the secret of her power. When she looked her worst the spell was as potent as when she looked her best. Hidden away somewhere was a vital spark which warmed every one who came in contact with it. Her lovely little person was a trifle below medium height, and it might as well be confessed

that her soul, on the morning when Stephen Waterman saw her hanging out the clothes on the river-bank, was not large enough to be at all out of proportion; but when eyes and dimples, lips and cheeks, enslave the onlooker, the soul is seldom subjected to a close or critical scrutiny. Besides, Rose Wiley was a nice girl, neat as wax, energetic, merry, amiable, economical. She was a dutiful granddaughter to two of the most irritating old people in the county; she never patronized her pug-nosed, pasty-faced girl friends; she made wonderful pies and doughnuts; and besides, small souls, if they are of the right sort, sometimes have a way of growing, to the discomfiture of cynics and the gratification of the angels.

So, on one bank of the river grew the brier rose, a fragile thing, swaying on a slender stalk and looking at its pretty reflection in the water; and on the other a sturdy pine tree, well rooted against wind and storm. And the sturdy pine yearned for the wild rose; and the rose, so far as it knew, yearned for nothing at all, certainly not for rugged pine trees standing tall and grim in rocky soil. If, in its present stage of development, it gravitated toward anything in particular, it would have been a well-dressed white birch growing on an irreproachable lawn.

And the river, now deep, now shallow, now smooth, now tumultuous, now sparkling in sunshine, now gloomy under clouds, rolled on to the engulfing sea. It could not stop to concern itself with the petty comedies and tragedies that were being enacted along its shores, else it would never have reached its destination. Only last night, under a full moon, there had been pairs of lovers leaning over the rails

of all the bridges along its course; but that was a common sight, like that of the ardent couples sitting on its shady banks these summer days, looking only into each other's eyes, but exclaiming about the beauty of the water. Lovers would come and go, sometimes reappearing with successive installments of loves in a way wholly mysterious to the river. Meantime it had its own work to do and must be about it, for the side jams were to be broken and the boom “let out” at the Edgewood bridge.

II. “Old Kennebec”

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It was just seven o'clock that same morning when Rose Wiley smoothed the last wrinkle from her dimity counterpane, picked up a shred of corn-husk from the spotless floor under the bed, slapped a mosquito on the window-sill, removed all signs of murder with a moist towel, and before running down to breakfast cast a frowning look at her pincushion. Almira, otherwise “Mite,” Shapley had been in her room the afternoon before and disturbed with her careless hand the pattern of Rose's pins. They were kept religiously in the form of a Maltese cross; and if, while she was extricating one from her clothing, there had been an alarm of fire, Rose would have stuck the pin in its appointed place in the design, at the risk of losing her life.

Entering the kitchen with her light step, she brought the morning sunshine with her. The old people had already engaged in differences of opinion, but they commonly suspended open warfare in her presence. There were the usual last things to be done for breakfast, offices that belonged to her as her grandmother's assistant. She took yesterday's soda biscuits out of the steamer where they were warming and softening; brought an apple pie and a plate of seed cakes from the pantry; settled the coffee with a piece of dried fish skin and an egg shell; and transferred some fried potatoes from the spider to a covered dish.

“Did you remember the meat, grandpa? We're all out,” she said, as she began buttoning a stiff collar around his reluctant neck.

“Remember? Land, yes! I wish't I ever could forgit anything! The butcher says he's 'bout tired o' travelin' over the country lookin' for critters to kill, but if he finds anything he'll be up along in the course of a week. He ain't a real smart butcher, Cyse Higgins ain't.—Land, Rose, don't button that dickey clean through my epperdummis! I have to sport starched collars in this life on account o' you and your gran'mother bein' so chock full o' style; but I hope to the Lord I shan't have to wear 'em in another world!”

“You won't,” his wife responded with the snap of a dish towel, “or if you do, they'll wilt with the heat.”

Rose smiled, but the soft hand with which she tied the neckcloth about the old man's withered neck pacified his spirit, and he smiled knowingly back at her as she took her seat at the breakfast table spread near the open kitchen door. She was a dazzling Rose, and, it is to be feared, a

wasted one, for there was no one present to observe her clean pink calico and the still more subtle note struck in the green ribbon which was tied round her throat,—the ribbon that formed a sort of calyx, out of which sprang the flower of her face, as fresh and radiant as if it had bloomed that morning.

“Give me my coffee turrible quick,” said Mr. Wiley; “I must be down to the bridge 'fore they start dog-warpin' the side jam.”

“I notice you're always due at the bridge on churnin' days,” remarked his spouse, testily.

“'T ain't me as app'ints drivin' dates at Edgewood,” replied the old man. “The boys'll hev a turrible job this year. The logs air ricked up jest like Rose's jack-straws; I never see 'em so turrible ricked up in all my exper'ence; an' Lije Dennett don' know no more 'bout pickin' a jam than Cooper's cow. Turrible sot in his ways, too; can't take a mite of advice. I was tellin' him how to go to work on that bung that's formed between the gre't gray rock an' the shore,—the awfullest place to bung that there is between this an' Biddeford,—and says he: 'Look here, I've be'n boss on this river for twelve year, an' I'll be doggoned if I'm goin' to be taught my business by any man!' 'This ain't no river,' says I, 'as you'd know,' says I, 'if you'd ever lived on the Kennebec.' 'Pity you hed n't stayed on it,' says he. 'I wish to the land I hed,' says I. An' then I come away, for my tongue's so turrible spry an' sarcustic that I knew if I stopped any longer I should stir up strife. There's some folks that'll set on addled aigs year in an' year out, as if there wa'n't good

fresh ones bein' laid every day; an' Lije Dennett's one of 'em, when it comes to river-drivin'."

"There's lots o' folks as have made a good livin' by mindin' their own business," observed the still sententious Mrs. Wiley, as she speared a soda biscuit with her fork.

"Mindin' your own business is a turrible selfish trade," responded her husband loftily. "If your neighbor is more ignorant than what you are,—partic'larly if he's as ignorant as Cooper's cow,—you'd ought, as a Kennebec man an' a Christian, to set him on the right track, though it's always a turrible risky thing to do." Rose's grandfather was called, by the irreverent younger generation, sometimes "Turrible Wiley" and sometimes "Old Kennebec," because of the frequency with which these words appeared in his conversation. There were not wanting those of late who dubbed him Uncle Ananias, for reasons too obvious to mention. After a long, indolent, tolerably truthful, and useless life, he had, at seventy-five, lost sight of the dividing line between fact and fancy, and drew on his imagination to such an extent that he almost staggered himself when he began to indulge in reminiscence. He was a feature of the Edgewood "drive," being always present during the five or six days that it was in progress, sometimes sitting on the river-bank, sometimes leaning over the bridge, sometimes reclining against the butt-end of a huge log, but always chewing tobacco and expectorating to incredible distances as he criticized and damned impartially all the expedients in use at the particular moment.

"I want to stay down by the river this afternoon," said Rose. "Ever so many of the girls will be there, and all my

sewing is done up. If grandpa will leave the horse for me, I'll take the drivers' lunch to them at noon, and bring the dishes back in time to wash them before supper."

"I suppose you can go, if the rest do," said her grandmother, "though it's an awful lazy way of spendin' an afternoon. When I was a girl there was no such dawdlin' goin' on, I can tell you. Nobody thought o' lookin' at the river in them days; there was n't time."

"But it's such fun to watch the logs!" Rose exclaimed. "Next to dancing, the greatest fun in the world."

"'Specially as all the young men in town will be there, watchin', too," was the grandmother's reply. "Eben Brooks an' Richard Bean got home yesterday with their doctors' diplomas in their pockets. Mrs. Brooks says Eben stood forty-nine in a class o' fifty-five, an' seemed consid'able proud of him; an' I guess it is the first time he ever stood anywheres but at the foot. I tell you when these fifty-five new doctors git scattered over the country there'll be consid'able many folks keepin' house under ground. Dick Bean's goin' to stop a spell with Rufe an' Steve Waterman. That'll make one more to play in the river."

"Rufus ain't hardly got his workin' legs on yit," allowed Mr. Wiley, "but Steve's all right. He's a turrible smart driver, an' turrible reckless, too. He'll take all the chances there is, though to a man that's lived on the Kennebec there ain't what can rightly be called any turrible chances on the Saco."

"He'd better be 'tendin' to his farm," objected Mrs. Wiley.

"His hay is all in," Rose spoke up quickly, "and he only helps on the river when the farm work is n't pressing.

Besides, though it's all play to him, he earns his two dollars and a half a day.”

“He don't keer about the two and a half,” said her grandfather. “He jest can't keep away from the logs. There's some that can't. When I first moved here from Gard'ner, where the climate never suited me—”

“The climate of any place where you hev regular work never did an' never will suit you,” remarked the old man's wife; but the interruption received no comment: such mistaken views of his character were too frequent to make any impression.

“As I was sayin', Rose,” he continued, “when we first moved here from Gard'ner, we lived neighbor to the Watermans. Steve an' Rufus was little boys then, always playin' with a couple o' wild cousins o' theirn, consid'able older. Steve would scare his mother pretty nigh to death stealin' away to the mill to ride on the 'carriage,' 'side o' the log that was bein' sawed, hitchin' clean out over the river an' then jerkin' back 'most into the jaws o' the machinery.”

“He never hed any common sense to spare, even when he was a young one,” remarked Mrs. Wiley; “and I don't see as all the 'cademy education his father throwed away on him has changed him much.” And with this observation she rose from the table and went to the sink.

“Steve ain't nobody's fool,” dissented the old man; “but he's kind o' daft about the river. When he was little he was allers buildin' dams in the brook, an' sailin' chips, an' runnin' on the logs; allers choppin' up stickins an' raftin' 'em together in the pond. I cai'late Mis' Waterman died consid'able afore her time, jest from fright, lookin' out the

winders and seein' her boys slippin' between the logs an' gittin' their daily dousin'. She could n't understand it, an' there's a heap o' things women-folks never do an' never can understand,—jest because they *air* women-folks."

"One o' the things is men, I s'pose," interrupted Mrs. Wiley.

"Men in general, but more partic'larly husbands," assented Old Kennebec; "howsomever, there's another thing they don't an' can't never take in, an' that's sport. Steve does river-drivin' as he would horse-racin' or tiger-shootin' or tight-rope dancin'; an' he always did from a boy. When he was about twelve to fifteen, he used to help the river-drivers spring and fall, reg'lar. He could n't do nothin' but shin up an' down the rocks after hammers an' hatchets an' ropes, but he was turrible pleased with his job. 'Stepanfetchit,' they used to call him them days,—Stepanfetchit Waterman."

"Good name for him yet," came in acid tones from the sink. "He's still steppin' an' fetchin', only it's Rose that's doin' the drivin' now."

"I'm not driving anybody, that I know of," answered Rose, with heightened color, but with no loss of her habitual self-command.

"Then, when he graduated from errants," went on the crafty old man, who knew that when breakfast ceased, churning must begin, "Steve used to get seventy-five cents a day helpin' clear up the river—if you can call this here silv'ry streamlet a river. He'd pick off a log here an' there an' send it afloat, an' dig out them that hed got ketched in the rocks, and tidy up the banks jest like spring house-cleanin'.

If he'd hed any kind of a boss, an' hed be'n trained on the Kennebec, he'd 'a' made a turrible smart driver, Steve would."

"He'll be drownded, that's what'll become o' him," prophesied Mrs. Wiley; "specially if Rose encourages him in such silly foolishness as ridin' logs from his house down to ourn, dark nights."

"Seein' as how Steve built ye a nice pigpen last month, 'pears to me you might have a good word for him now an' then, mother," remarked Old Kennebec, reaching for his second piece of pie.

"I wa'n't a mite deceived by that pigpen, no more'n I was by Jed Towle's hencoop, nor Ivory Dunn's well-curb, nor Pitt Packard's shed-steps. If you hed ever kep' up your buildin's yourself, Rose's beaux would n't hev to do their courtin' with carpenters' tools."

"It's the pigpen an' the hencoop you want to keep your eye on, mother, not the motives of them as made 'em. It's turrible onsettlin' to inspeck folks' motives too turrible close."

"Riding a log is no more to Steve than riding a horse, so he says," interposed Rose, to change the subject; "but I tell him that a horse does n't revolve under you, and go sideways at the same time that it is going forwards."

"Log-ridin' ain't no trick at all to a man of sperit," said Mr. Wiley. "There's a few places in the Kennebec where the water's too shaller to let the logs float, so we used to build a flume, an' the logs would whiz down like arrers shot from a bow. The boys used to collect by the side o' that there flume to see me ride a log down, an' I've watched 'em drop in a

dead faint when I spun by the crowd; but land! you can't drownd some folks, not without you tie nail-kags to their head an' feet an' drop 'em in the falls; I've rid logs down the b'ilin'est rapids o' the Kennebec an' never lost my head. I remember well the year o' the gre't freshet, I rid a log from __”

“There, there, father, that'll do,” said Mrs. Wiley, decisively. “I'll put the cream in the churn, an' you jest work off' some o' your steam by bringin' the butter for us afore you start for the bridge. It don't do no good to brag afore your own women-folks; work goes consid'able better'n stories at every place 'cept the loafers' bench at the tavern.”

And the baffled raconteur, who had never done a piece of work cheerfully in his life, dragged himself reluctantly to the shed, where, before long, one could hear him moving the dasher up and down sedately to his favorite “churning tune” of

Broad is the road that leads to death,
And thousands walk together there;
But Wisdom shows a narrow path,
With here and there a traveler.

III. The Edgewood “Drive”

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Just where the bridge knits together the two little villages of Pleasant River and Edgewood, the glassy mirror of the

Saco broadens suddenly, sweeping over the dam in a luminous torrent. Gushes of pure amber mark the middle of the dam, with crystal and silver at the sides, and from the seething vortex beneath the golden cascade the white spray dashes up in fountains. In the crevices and hollows of the rocks the mad water churns itself into snowy froth, while the foam-flecked torrent, deep, strong, and troubled to its heart, sweeps majestically under the bridge, then dashes between wooded shores piled high with steep masses of rock, or torn and riven by great gorges.

There had been much rain during the summer, and the Saco was very high, so on the third day of the Edgewood drive there was considerable excitement at the bridge, and a goodly audience of villagers from both sides of the river. There were some who never came, some who had no fancy for the sight, some to whom it was an old story, some who were too busy, but there were many to whom it was the event of events, a never-ending source of interest.

Above the fall, covering the placid surface of the river, thousands of logs lay quietly “in boom” until the “turning out” process, on the last day of the drive, should release them and give them their chance of display, their brief moment of notoriety, their opportunity of interesting, amusing, exciting, and exasperating the onlookers by their antics.

Heaps of logs had been cast up on the rocks below the dam, where they lay in hopeless confusion, adding nothing, however, to the problem of the moment, for they too bided their time. If they had possessed wisdom, discretion, and caution, they might have slipped gracefully over the falls

and, steering clear of the hidden ledges (about which it would seem they must have heard whispers from the old pine trees along the river), have kept a straight course and reached their destination without costing the Edgewood Lumber Company a small fortune. Or, if they had inclined toward a jolly and adventurous career, they could have joined one of the various jams or “bungs,” stimulated by the thought that any one of them might be a key-log, holding for a time the entire mass in its despotic power. But they had been stranded early in the game, and, after lying high and dry for weeks, would be picked off one by one and sent downstream.

In the tumultuous boil, the foaming hubbub and flurry at the foot of the falls, one enormous peeled log wallowed up and clown like a huge rhinoceros, greatly pleasing the children by its clumsy cavortings. Some conflict of opposing forces kept it ever in motion, yet never set it free. Below the bridge were always the real battle-grounds, the scenes of the first and the fiercest conflicts. A ragged ledge of rock, standing well above the yeasty torrent, marked the middle of the river. Stephen had been stranded there once, just at dusk, on a stormy afternoon in spring. A jam had broken under the men, and Stephen, having taken too great risks, had been caught on the moving mass, and, leaping from log to log, his only chance for life had been to find a footing on Gray Rock, which was nearer than the shore.

Rufus was ill at the time, and Mrs. Waterman so anxious and nervous that processions of boys had to be sent up to the River Farm, giving the frightened mother the latest bulletins of her son's welfare. Luckily, the river was narrow