

**THE TIMES
THAT WERE**

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The Times that Were by Elizabeth Ballard Thompson

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ELIZABETH BALLARD THOMPSON

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BY

ELIZABETH BALLARD THOMPSON.

ILLUSTRATED BY

HELEN E. MILLER.

with love Elizabeth Ballard Thompson

—“and year by year the landscape grow
Familiar to the stranger's child”—

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*Many who were with us upon the completion of this retrospect,
walk with us no longer.*

TO MISS MARY A. WHITE OF GRAND HAVEN,
FOR SIXTY-FIVE YEARS BELOVED AND REVERED
IN THE GRAND RIVER VALLEY, IS INSCRIBED THIS
RETROSPECT.

1895
AG 2111
1895



On a bank of the Deerfield stands a country house built early in the present century.

In the mid-thirties, the youngest son of a large progeny reared here, emigrated to Michigan with wife and family, and in the wilderness, three miles from an Indian trading post, proceeded to reproduce the home of his boyhood. With filial care he copied each detail. There was the same colonial build—long hall through center of both stories, large square rooms, low ceiled, opening on either side through narrow doors, and spacious garret for chests, spinning-wheels and reels.

Outside was the same arrangement of brick smoke-house, corn and poultry houses, stable and big hay barn.

Then there was the New England garden to be reproduced.

Our pioneer loved gardening, and with the help of his black Gabriel* (come to him through the underground railroad), the garden became a thing to see.

There are some who remember that garden, nay, there are some whom Heaven is good to, and lets them be young again when they dream of it.

It lay north of the house across a grass plat, and contained one acre—an acre, which to one childish imagination assumed the limitless proportions of the Garden of Eden. The Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil were two enormous apple trees in the center of the garden, on either side the great flower mound,

*Old Gabriel and his slave life stories added a touch of the picturesque. Bits of his humor still float as sayings: "Ole house, ole wagon, ole harness is an express (expense) to a man." "Two missus in one house makes two intrresses (interests) there."



toward which all paths from the vegetable beds converged. Once the child asked its father when he was going to bring in the four rivers; and sometimes, after sunset, slipping inside the hollyhock hedge and down the main walk, bordered with clove pinks and poppies, the child would listen, expecting to hear the Voice of the Lord in the cool of the day.

When our pioneer came west, he had been graduated from Williams College, and had taken a post-graduate course in theology. His equipment soon called him to the pastorate of the Congregational church, and later to the principalship of the public schools in the village. But he continued to live upon his farm, and years followed, divided between intellectual and pastoral pursuits. In those years his intense vitality and strong convictions (for there was no wrong he did not stand ready to lead a crusade against, without fear or favor), made his house a natural gathering place for a wide variety of people. His library and scientific apparatus were the first brought

from the east, and in the study (lower front room on the left), was to be heard much talk of Sons of Temperance, Wilmot Proviso, Free Soil and Liberty Party.

More than one young man coming to advise with the minister as to his career, left this room fired by that magnetic personality to aspire to heights before undreamed of.

Here, too, of a Saturday evening the minister declaimed the sermon he would preach next day, until the children up-stairs, in their high-posters, wondered.

In the square parlor on the right, many a couple has been joined in holy matrimony, Mary Webster and John Ball (the gay young bachelor of sixty), among the number, the abashed children of the household, just out of tub and all but in bed, being summoned to this room at nine o'clock one Saturday night as witnesses to the ceremony.

No house ever stood more completely for plain living and high thinking than this one. Nor entirely from choice. Absorption of ready money attendant upon emigration, together with failures of local banks, had made exchange of commodities imperative.

These were the times, when, to quote from the Baxter history, a comfortable home can be built for one dollar, plus dicker.

A missionary society contributed to the support of our missionary, two hundred dollars a year and a missionary box (the recollection of the bonnets in those missionary boxes still maketh the blood to curdle), the rest of his living supposed to be supplemented by his farm produce, scattering, oh! very scattering five-dollar gold pieces from parishioners, and donation parties.*

If you met a sleighing party setting out in the edge of the evening, you

*The nearly gratuitous services of these years are affectionately acknowledged by a tablet in the Congregational Church to the memory of Rev. James Ballard.





could be tolerably sure they were heading toward Fisk's and the Lake House for a dance and supper, or toward our minister's for a donation party.

How many of them have driven out, the longest way around most likely, by way of the Woodward's and Reed's Lake, the red school house and *Mrs. Parson's, and taken possession of the minister's house, serving the supper they had brought, in the long living-room at the end of the hall, other rooms below stairs given up to games and jollity—the Needle's Eye, led by Warren Mills singing :



"For many a lass have I let pass, because I wanted you."

* You will find Mrs. Parsons in her half-century old house, among flowers, a repository of old-time stories. Should you drive out to her flower-garden some morning, ask for her Common Council story with frills and ruffles. Plainly told, she