

**FLORENCE, THE PARISH
ORPHAN: AND A
SKETCH OF THE VILLAGE
IN THE LAST CENTURY**

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Florence, the Parish Orphan: And A Sketch of the Village in the Last Century by Eliza
Buckminster Lee

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ELIZA BUCKMINSTER LEE

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PARISH ORPHAN;
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A SKETCH OF THE VILLAGE
IN THE LAST CENTURY.

BY
ELIZA BUCKMINSTER LEE,
AUTHOR OF 'NAOMI.'

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THE reader should be informed, that the second portion of this little book was published thirteen years ago. It was then received with great favor by persons whose good opinion is very precious to the author, but like other things of trifling importance it passed out of sight, and is now recalled only as connected with the Parish Orphan.

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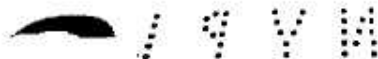
FLORENCE, THE PARISH ORPHAN.

CHAPTER I.

'Then Nature said, "A lovelier flower
On earth was never sown ;
This child I to myself will take ;
She shall be mine, and I will make
A lady of my own."'

THE old meeting-houses and school-houses of New England, with no beauty of architecture, and no durability of structure, possess yet a moral interest in the eyes of the descendants of the Puritan fathers. They are eloquent with the two great ideas, that prevailed in the early Commonwealth,—religion and education. The school-houses of the New England villages bore, at the end of the last century, a striking resemblance to the meeting-houses, inferior only in proportion to the importance they held in the

estimation of our ancestors. Both were plain unpainted barn-like structures, upon whose exterior the changes of the seasons, and in some places the salt spray of the ocean, had woven a rich embroidery of brown and leaf-like moss, often giving them the venerable appearance of dark and mouldering stone. The school-house was usually a one-story, square wooden structure, standing a little aside from the road, but under the wing of the meeting-house. The turf in front, kept short and smooth by the sports of the village children, greatly aided by the flocks of village geese, which were usually turned out to get their precarious living upon the turf of the roadside, before the iron railroad had ploughed it up, and upon the green knolls which elevated the meeting-house and the school-house above the village inn and the village pound. Harmless and innocent commoners! who, that loves rural sights and sounds, can forget the repose of a summer's afternoon, when the drowsy school is quiet from the lassitude of heat, and the bright sun checkers the turf beneath the flickering branches of the elms, and the stillness is suddenly broken by the prolonged and joyous quack of a flock of these pure white and silvery-gray feathered birds, as they rise from



their repose and march slowly to the roadside pond.

The school-house of our village stood upon the meeting-house hill, to which a few scattered elms lent a partial but most welcome shade. It was a lowly, humble building, wearing, both within and without, the brown hue of unpainted boards. The desks and benches within, divided by an alley running up the middle, were polished bright with wear, and variegated with the sculptured names and other grotesque characters, the marks of the successive penknives of the youthful occupants. Children and young people of both sexes attended the village grammar-school, which was often placed under the care of young men of very superior character and attainments. In the simple and frugal early times of New England, it was no disgrace to the very first in the land to pay their college expenses by teaching a village school, and the long winter vacation furnished them with funds to meet the expenses of the remainder of the year. Among such are the illustrious names of Fisher Ames, Daniel Webster, and a host of others. Indeed, the difficulty would be in New England to find a great man who had not been, at some short period of his life, a teacher of the village school.