

**A WINTERSNIGHT
TALE**

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A wintersnight tale by Charles Henry Dalton

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CHARLES HENRY DALTON

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TALE**

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**WINTERSNIGHT
TALE**

by
Charles Henry Ballou



BOSTON : MDCCCIII

Told on Christmas Evening, 1903

to

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dalton

Major and Mrs. Henry Dalton

Mrs. Frank Morison

Elsie Dalton

Susan Howe

Isabel Morison

Harry Dalton

Julia Dwight

Alice Dalton

Leslie Morison

Philip Dalton

Susan Dalton

Mac Gregor Morison

Ellen Dalton

Rogers Rich

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THE first Town Meeting of the Chelmsford settlement, in Middlesex County, was held September 22, 1654, more than two hundred and forty-nine years ago, at William Fletcher's house, there being no public town-house.

My maternal ancestor, Edward Spaulding, as the name was then spelt, was chosen one of the Selectmen, as he was several times subsequently.

He married Margaret.

His son John married Hannah.

His son Edward married Priscilla, Governor Endicott officiating.

His son Joseph married Elizabeth.

His son Simeon married Sarah.

His son Noah married Anne.

Noah and Anne were my grandparents.

These six generations of gentlemen were yeomen, living on and cultivating their own

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lands, while serving the town, colony, state and church in various public offices.

My great-grandfather, Colonel Simeon, inherited lands from his father in 1728. When he was twenty-three years old, having fallen in love with Sarah, he married her, and that same year bought more land and soon built a house on it, where they lived the rest of their lives. This was our Chelmsford homestead, which my grandfather Noah inherited. He, his daughter Julia, who was my mother, and myself were born in this house. It is about one hundred and sixty years old, and is still standing, a modest structure of two stories, the hewed posts and beams of the frame showing in the rooms. The oil picture, copied from a pencil drawing of my brother John's, hangs on the wall of this room where we are now eating our 1903 Christmas dinner.

There are, you will notice, several ancient elms about the house, which must be nearly if

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not quite the same age, and I suppose Colonel Simeon planted them.

My grandfather Noah was fond of having his grandchildren about him, so it was here that, after my father moved to his own house, I stayed a great deal in summers, and often in winters, during my early teens. It seemed to me the pleasantest of all possible places. I liked it better than going to school.

Sixty-odd years ago life on a New England farm was very different from that of to-day, as were also the characters and qualities of the households. The farms, then, had usually descended through several generations of pure English stock, as you will have noticed by the names of the gentlemen and gentlewomen which I have mentioned in the opening of this story. In examining the first town records of Chelmsford I did not find a solitary name other than English.

Furthermore, the "hired men," so called,

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were young Americans, who came down from New Hampshire and Vermont to work during the summer months. Their pay was fourteen to sixteen dollars a month, with board and lodging. They were generally young fellows of excellent character, with plenty of self-respect. They did not shirk their duties, but worked long hours, especially in haying and harvesting time.

Much of my time was passed in their company, in riding the horse while they held the plow between the rows of potatoes and corn, and in the hay-fields, and in turning the grindstone when they sharpened their scythes, a kind of labor which made me tired.

Nearly all the food consumed by the household and animals was raised on the farm, and various industries, requiring no little knowledge and skill, were carried on to supply the domestic wants. Purchases of food were limited to such articles as tea, coffee, sugar, spirits, spices, etc. The products of the farm were