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A Letter written from "The Old Homestead", Darien, Ct. July 24, 1877.

By A. B. W.

Read at the Sequi-Centennial  
August 10, 1928.

\* I think the letter was  
published in the  
Wallon Chronicle.

222  
AN OLD-TIME STORY.

About a hundred years ago, --- or, to be ~~more~~ exact, just ninety-nine years ago this summer, --- the son of a New England minister, possessing a goodly heritage of land from his mother, built a house upon it. This house, properly modeled after the usual style of New England architecture, two stories and an attic, with the regulation number of front windows-- two on each side of the door, and five in the second story-- was erected almost in the extreme corner of the township of Darien; the land lying partly in that township, partly in Norwalk, <sup>and</sup> partly in New Canaan-- a great convenience (?) you will readily see, in the matter of tax-paying.

{ This house, built by Joseph Mather, still stands, and I, happening to belong to the old Mather family (of which the Rev. Cotton was a somewhat better known member) have had the good fortune to spend more or less time at "the old homestead" every year, and thus to become better acquainted with it than almost any other one of the two hundred (or thereabout) living descendants of the great-grandfather whose home it was, and three of whose daughters still live here, the oldest over ninety years of age, the second over eighty, and the youngest, who is also the youngest of the large family, now over seventy. You will guess that the family is remarkable for longevity as well as for numbers. "Length of days and long life" have been their portion, and the 127th and 128th Psalms might be their special song. }

This is a wonderful old house. If you could sit with me as I write in this "old back chamber", --a long, unfinished room, extending the entire length of the house, whose uncovered beams and rafters look strong enough to support ~~the~~ the weight of another century-- you would see many strange and incongruous old-fashioned things gathered in the one apartment. As there are no closets in the house, except two corner cupboards, all articles of wearing

apparel, furniture and heir-looms, are obliged to range themselves as best they may, in the attic and "chambers".

Directly opposite me, ~~as~~ as I write, hangs a ghostly object, which, ( or a similar one, ) used to be the secret terror and fascination of my childhood days. It is a sheet pinned carefully in a shroud-like manner, around what I suppose to be garments. I have not investigated. I did not dare do so formerly, and now the object has become so familiar that I have lost all curiosity.

It would seem like sacrilege to mention some of the things that meet my eye, so I will content myself with merely a brief notice of the great chimney which slopes back up one side of the room, the stones sticking irregularly out, <sup>and</sup> forming a sort of rough steps. This, however, is now concealed by a pretty quilt of Roman-cross pattern, ~~being~~ hung before it; and my little cot, one of three beds in the room, stands across it. The floor is rough and uneven, partially covered with loose pieces of rag carpet.

It always seemed to me when a child, that this was the grandest room in the ~~house~~ world for a play-room, and now it is my favorite sitting-room. It is ~~is~~ very homely, but does not that very word express enough of the quiet happiness of the place?

I wish you could see the chimney-place in the kitchen. It contains three stoves, numerous baskets and kettles, etc., etc., and room besides for two or three chairs on the brick floor. It has a curtain to draw before the huge gap, to conceal its contents when desirable. Oh! to have seen it in the days when stoves were yet unknown, and the great logs blazed and crackled on those blackened old andirons! [And in the wall beside the open fire-place ~~is~~ is a Dutch oven for baking.]

~~From this pleasant east window, I used to be able to see the~~ Sound; but the old apple-tree [Sweet Bough] has grown so large that the sparkle of the bright blue water is hidden from me now. Not so very many rods to the east, is the old family burying ground, ~~belonging~~ where so many of my



he was finally exchanged."

This was the second time the reverend gentleman was a prisoner for his patriotism. The story of the event is told in a remarkable heroic poem, modeled perhaps from Homer or Virgil, and entitled "Poetical Relation of the capture of the Congregation at Middlesex" (the old name of the town,) "with an Account of their sufferings, &c., while in captivity, by Peter St John," who, I judge, was one of the prisoners.\* I wish the poem were not too long to give in full. I will give you about a third of the part that I have:

"Now to relate t'is my intent,  
A sad and tragical event.  
On what I write you may rely,  
As I've the history lying by.  
July the twenty-second day,  
Where Christians met to sing and pray,  
I n seven~~ten~~ hundred eighty-one,  
A horrid action was begun;  
While to the Lord they sing and pray,  
The tories who in ambush lay,  
Beset the house with brazen face,  
At Middlesex it was the place.  
A guard was placed the house before,  
Likewise behind and at each door.  
Then void of shame, those men of sin,  
The sacred temple entered in.  
The reverend MATHER clos'd his book;  
How did the congregation look?

The reverend priest, that man of God,  
Severely felt the smarting rod,  
Not by a whip do I ~~pretend~~, pretend,  
But by abuses from those friends.  
How must he feel to see his sheep,  
Thus worried whilst they silence keep.

\* but not until reaching the sound as they returned,  
[Here, by the way, I inserted the fact that the said Peter was a direct ancestor of my son-in-law, that an old history of Walton ~~states~~ says that this Peter St John, "the famous Revolutionary poet" came to Walton in the early 1800's. "He was a man of excellent classic education, reading at sight in Hebrew, Greek and Latin languages. Several of his patriotic poems (?) are still extant. The writer" who was a man nearly 90, "remembers one called Burgoyne's Lamentation". He was a leading man in society, and a pillar in the church, a sound theologian, able to give a reason for the hope that was in him."]

These demons plundered what they could, ~~Either~~

Either in silver or in gold.

The silver buckles which we use

Both at the knees and on the shoes,

These caitiffs took them in their rage.

Had no respect to sex or age.

And as they all were searching round,

They several silver watches found.

They who were placed as guards without, ~~Seek~~

Like ~~raging~~ devils rang'd about,  
Took forty horses to the shore,

Not many either less or more,

With bridles, saddles, pillions on,

In a few minutes all was done.

The men which hence they took away

Upon this sacred awful day

Were forty-eight, besides two more

They chanced to find upon the shore." (*— One the author of the poem? —*)

The old desk upon which old Dr. Mather used to write his sermons, now stands upon our back shed, degraded, alas! to the ignominious office of a wash-stand. Its first owner preached in the old meeting-house, two miles and a half distant from here, sixty-two years; and there, last Sunday, exactly ninety-six years from that "sacred day-day awful day", I heard his great grandson preach. Looking down from my seat in the choir, which is composed of "children's children", I saw that most of the large congregation were members of the one family. How goodly a sight it was!

To the venerable divine, father of all these generations, seemed fulfilled the promise, his through faith: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee."

"His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed."