

are outsiders—in fact of little account. To me it seemed (forty years ago) that a circle of thirty or forty miles diameter, taking in Gorton and Skendle and the fine fishing-places of the Erne at about its centre, comprised the chief part of what was valuable and important in the world. And it was no wonder therefore that all that happened in the neighborhood was of great moment in my eyes, and took a somewhat firm place in my memory. And at this distance of time, the necessity of the "Ancient Mariner" seems still upon me; and I must find some "wedding-guest" or "other" to whom my tale must be told. Do we understand each other? Well then!

After puddling round the little creek for several summers, catching little shiners and engineering innumerable hydraulic undertakings, and whittling round the big open fire for as many winters, a solemn vote was taken in family council (in my absence!), and I was duly informed that it had been deliberately decided that "John must go to school." I scarcely liked the look of things. I did not like the master—he had once been unsound in his mind, and I made the most of the circumstance—and it was some distance, "and I should have to go alone!" The fates were against me: I must start! In those days a dole of public money was given to every teacher who applied for it, and brought evidence that he had taught a regular school under self-elected or other trustees for at least three months. And each scholar was charged two dollars a quarter—if the master was not "boarded;" or a dollar and a half if the master boarded a week for each scholar. My master was a family man; and so two dollars was the rate. The temple of learning in this case was a little weather-beaten frame building, with a long desk fastened to each wall, and a few benches—mere planks supported on four legs—in the centre of the room. My toes did not quite reach to the floor; and I often wished that when they were building the house they had made the floors a little *higher*! Noah Webster was in the ascendant with us as to spelling and reading; but the edition we patronized did not reflect much credit on the book-binder; for before we got to "ba-ker" and "la-dy" the

boards—they were "boards" of thin pine covered with paper—were generally off; along the road somewhere. When weather got colder, the master discovered a weakness for popped corn. He would put a handful on the hot stove; and as soon as a kernel flopped his jacket inside out, he would eat it; and watch for the next pop. It was quite beyond the virtue of little boys to see this performance without taking measures to share in it. So, no sooner did the corn begin to fidget on the stove, than somebody wanted the master in another part of the room; and when he got back, his corn was all gone. "All jumped off!" the boys said; but the master had his suspicions.

The school was intermittent; and there were long spells at home. But the ability to read and write opened up a new world to me. We made a great effort and joined with a neighbor and took the *Toronto Whacker*. It was published on Tuesdays and Fridays, and we got it in three or four days after date. In it, besides the proceedings of the Upper Canada Parliament, and six to eight weeks' old English news, was always a chapter of Sam Slick, which I hugely enjoyed. Whether it was that, like as Artemus Ward said of Chaucer, the author "couldn't *spell*," or why it was written just as Yankees *talk*, I could not tell; but to read "in a paper" exactly the same kind of talk I heard from boys of American extraction at school, was not only entertaining but profoundly perplexing. It set me thinking whether I could not be an author myself; and before I was ten years old, I had planned out a Dictionary on some vastly improved pattern; and if the ambition of being an author had not been supplanted by a still stronger ambition of being an orator—and if both had not been utterly swept away by a most enthusiastic and bewildering passion for a little brown-eyed girl with slightly-freckled cheeks that sat opposite to me at a second school I attended for a short time,—I don't know where I should have been carried. Sometimes also, but very seldom, we got hold of a copy of the *New York Albion*, and devoured its contents. I do not believe that the country, even in the backwoods, is one atom less favorable