

which she knew would delight Mrs. Highbury, the wife of the principal ruling elder of Whittaker's church, was perplexed to find some pretext for calling on Mrs. Highbury that she might not seem to have come on purpose to tell tales. Experienced gossip that she was, she could not get over the notion that her traffic in information was illicit. She might have called on Mrs. Highbury outright; for there is no caste feeling in a village that proscribes the milliner. A woman was none the worse in the Hoosier Luzerne in 1841 for the possession of that kind of skill which we call a trade. But Miss Moore, at last, remembered something that she wanted to ask Mrs. Highbury's advice about, or at least she remembered something concerning which she contrived to make herself believe she wanted information or counsel. So Miss Moore went up under the grape-vines that led to Mr. Highbury's door, and then around over the stone-paved walk to the back door, where the wide arbour shaded the broad pavement, in the middle of which stood the cistern with its hook in readiness for use.

Miss Moore went in over the broad clean porch into the sitting-room and was received cordially; for besides her importance as a milliner, she was also a member of the Presbyterian church, and in those days of polemical animosities a small and somewhat beleaguered denomination held closely together.

"I thought I'd run over, Mrs. Highbury, and ask you about the cape to your bonnet. How long do you think it ought to be?"

Mrs. Highbury had a habit of leaving such things to the superior judgment of the milliner. For the milliner to throw the decision back on her, was like asking her to solve a problem in geometry. And so the plump, well-fed little lady sank down in her arm-chair and began rocking herself so energetically as to lift her feet off the floor at each tilt backward. Her mind was exhausting itself in thinking how impossible it was that she should ever decide what should be the length of a piece of rose-coloured silk at the base of a scoop-shovel bonnet.

"I declare to goodness, I don't know, Miss Moore." Here Mrs. Highbury opened her fan, and began to ply it and rock more vigorously and cheerfully than before. "Did you see the one that lady from Cincinnati had on at church, on Sunday?"

Of course, Miss Moore had noted every bonnet in the church. "She was not such a heathen as not to make the most of her 'Sabbath and sanctuary privileges.'" But she did not reply to Mrs. Highbury's question. For here was the opportunity she had sought. It was a dangerous leap from the cape of a straw bonnet in church to the parson's love affair, but there might not come a better opportunity.

"Yes; but now you speak of church, reminds me. Did you notice any change in Mr. Whittaker's appearance on Sunday?"

"No, I didn't. Why?"

Miss Moore felt her superiority now.

"Did you think he had the look of a man just engaged to be married?"

"You don't tell me Mr. Whittaker's going to be married," cried the stout little lady, forgetting to rock, and allowing the toes of her shoes to rest on the floor.

"Well; I don't say anything about it. I've heard something of the kind."