

IX. Miscellaneous.

1. THE SCHOOL-MASTER'S GUESTS.

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I.

The district school-master was sitting behind his great book-laden desk,
Close-watching the motions of scholars, pathetic and gay and grotesque.
As whisper the half-leafless branches, when Autumn's brisk breezes have come,
His little scrub-thicket of pupils sent upward a half-smothered hum.
Like the frequent sharp bang of a wagon, when treading a forest path o'er,
Resounded the feet of his pupils, whenever their heels struck the floor.

There was little Tom Timms on the front seat,
whose face was withstanding a drouth ;
And jolly Jack Cobbs just behind him, with a rainy new moon for a mouth.

There were both of the Smith boys, as studious as if they bore names that could bloom ;
And Jim Jones, a heaven-built mechanic, the slyest young knave in the room,

With a countenance grave as a horse's, and his honest eyes fixed on a pin,
Queer-bent on a deeply-laid project to tunnel Joe Hawkins's skin.

There were anxious young novices, drilling their spelling-books into the brain,
Loud-puffing each half-whispered letter, like an engine just starting its train.

There was one fiercely muscular fellow, who scowled at the sums on his slate,
And leered at the innocent figures a look of unspeakable hate,

And set his white teeth close together, and gave his thin lip a short twist,
As to say, "I could whip you, confound you ! could such things be done with the fist !"

There were two knowing girls in the corner, each one with some beauty possessed,
In a whisper discussing the problem which one the young master likes best.

A class in the front, with their readers, were telling with difficult pains,
How perished brave Marco Bozzaris while bleeding at all of his veins ;

And a boy on the floor to be punished, a statue of idleness stood,
Making faces at all of the others, and enjoying the scene all he could.

II.

Around were the walls gray and dingy, which every old school-sanctum hath,
With many a break on their surface, where grinned a wood-grating of lath.

A patch of thick plaster, just over the school-master's rickety chair,
Seemed threat'ningly o'er him suspended, like Damocles' sword by a hair.

There were tracks on the desks where the knife-blades had wandered in search of their prey ;
Their tops were as duskily spattered as if they drank ink every day.

The square stove it puffed and it crackled, and broke out in red-flaming sores,
Till the great iron quadruped trembled like a dog fierce to rush out-o'-doors.

White snow-flakes looked in at the windows ; the gale pressed its lips to the cracks ;

And the children's hot faces were streaming, the while they were freezing their backs.

III.

Now Marco Bozzaris had fallen, and all of his suff'rings were o'er,
And the class to their seats were retreating, when footsteps were heard at the door ;
And five of the good district fathers marched into the room in a row,
And stood themselves up by the hot fire, and shook off their white cloaks of snow ;
And the spokesman, a grave squire of sixty, with countenance solemnly sad,



"AND NODDED OBLIQUELY, AND MUTTERED, 'THEM 'ERE IS MY SENTIMENTS TEW.'"

Spoke thus, while the children all listened, with all of the ears that they had :

"We've come here, school-master, intendin' to cast an inquirin' eye 'round,
Concernin' complaints that's been entered, an' fault that has lately been found ;

To pace off the width of your doin's, an' witness what you've been about,
An' see if it's payin' to keep you, or whether we'd best turn ye out.

"The first thing I'm bid for to mention is, when the class gets up to read,
You give 'em too tight of a reinin', an' touch 'em up more than they need ;

You're nicer than wise in the matter of holdin' the book in one han',
An' you turn a stray *g* in their doin's, an' tack an odd *d* on their an'.

There ain't no great good comes of speakin' the words so *polite*, as *I* see,
Providin' you know what the facts is, an' tell 'em off jest as they be.

An' then there's that readin' in cornert, is censured from first unto last ;

It kicks up a heap of a racket, when folks is a travelin' past.

Whatever is done as to readin', providin' things go to *my* say,
Sha'n't hang on no new-fangled hinges, but swing in the old-fashioned way."

And the other four good district fathers gave quick the consent that was due,
And nodded obliquely, and muttered, "*Them 'ere is my sentiments tew.*"