

PREFACE.

ONE episode of this story may need a word of explanation. It is reported that while the "Millerite" or Adventist excitement of 1843 was agitating certain parts of North America, in one place at least a little band of white-robed people ascended a hill in sure expectation of the Second Advent, and patiently returned to be the laughing stock of their neighbours. This tradition, as I heard it in my childhood, was repeated as if it embodied nothing but eccentricity and absurdity, yet it naturally struck a child's mind with peculiar feelings of awe and pathos. Such an event appeared picturesque matter for a story. It was not easy to deal with; for in setting it, as was necessary, in close relation to the gain-getting, marrying and giving in marriage, of the people among whom it might occur; it was difficult to avoid either giving it a poetic emphasis which it would not appear to have in reality or degrading it by that superficial truth often called realism, which belittles men. Any unworthiness in the working out of the incident is