

Our Story.

HIS MONTH AT POKE ISLAND. IN TWO CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

THE Rev. Phineas Dustin, of Hucks, near Barnbury, found among his mail one evening a letter in a yellow envelope, addressed in an old-fashioned turned hand. It was from the clerk of the church at Poke Island. Would he hear the Macedonian cry and visit Poke Island, there to break to them the bread of life for one month, with a view to settlement? The Rev. Phineas Dustin went home to his wife with glad heart, and that night they offered thanks to God for this providential opening. He had preached in Hucks many years and would have gladly remained many more; but the craze for a younger man had struck the parish. He was not so very old—only fifty-three or thereabouts—but he had not learned all the new and novel methods, useful and otherwise, which the younger generation were using. The young people and some of the older ones demanded a minister who should introduce all the new ways, giving little or no thought to such a thing as individual conversion resulting. Some had resigned not with resentment, but with sorrow.

That was four months before. The church had not settled a pastor though there had been several candidates. The Rev. Phineas Dustin had preached as a supply a few times here and there, but no hint of calling him had ever been made; so this letter from Poke Island seemed to him almost a call. It was Wednesday evening when the letter came, and the parson and his wife, after long consultation over the matter, decided that he should start for Poke Island that following Friday by the forenoon coach. This was done. The Rev. Phineas Dustin took his departure with light heart and serene face, carrying his inseparable friend, the umbrella, and his hand bag. This latter was facetiously referred to by the driver as a "gripsack full of Gospel"; but he meant no harm, as he gave the parson a free ride to the depot at Barnbury. It was only a two-hours' ride by railroad to the coach connection for Poke Island, but it was nearly evening when he reached the end of his journey, and was left by the roadside at a path leading to a house perched high above on the bluff which gave an unobstructed view of the ocean. This was the home of Deacon Purkis who kept the "ministers' hotel," which in every parish some warm heart usually opens. The deacon and his wife were, from principle, the friend of the minister, and, having no children and still mourning over the death of the deacon's aged mother six months ago, were very glad to entertain the Rev. Phineas Dustin. The next day our parson took a look over his prospective parish, a sort of bird's eye view, geographical and spiritual. It was a crooked, straggling sort of town.

Nearly every street began at a small wharf and, running back a little way into the country, ended in some farmer's door-yard. The one road worthy of the name was the old turnpike by which he arrived, which led along shore to the newer settlement at the Bluffs. The people were plenty, hard-working, warm-hearted, many forehanded. Farming and fishing were the industries, and most families carried on both branches. Before he got back to the house the deacon met him and asked him to go and visit his mother's grave. It was on a bleak hillside, seaward, one of a few mounds composing the family lot, and very dreary because of its location. Over the maternal grave a plain marble slab had been erected, with this remarkable inscription following the name and age:

"Honour virtue, Love, combine, This mother is mine. J. P." It was original; the deacon's masterpiece, carved in marble, with his own initials added. In the eyes of the village and in his own eyes the deacon had at one stroke given honour to his mother and won fame for himself.

Sunday morning dawned bright and clear and the Rev. Phineas Dustin entered the church in like condition. A little embarrassed during the preliminaries, he forgot it all during the long prayer, when he uttered the real longings of his heart. The sermon was somewhat lengthy, logical, and full of life and hope. In fact, the preacher thought that night that if he had only preached that way in Hucks he perhaps would not now be candidating. The people of Poke Island were delighted. Just what they wanted, they said to one another. Several of the brethren told the preacher so; some of the sisters wanted to. He was invited to call at many places, and then and there made several engagements to dine during the week. Squire Davis became his supporter because of a reference the preacher had made to the Squire's *Alma Mater*, Tompkins Academy of Barnbury, now gone into a decline. In the Sunday school and in the evening service our parson strengthened his hold on the people, and he in turn was charmed with them and their homely ways. He was astonished beyond measure that he who had been so snubbed and unappreciated in Hucks should be so admired in Poke Island. What wonder that he went off to sleep that night a happy man? During the week that followed he faithfully visited among the many families of the parish, going by neither the

poor house at the East End nor the great glaring white hotel at the Bluffs, where the summer boarders congregated. Before the week was over there were none who had not seen and spoken with the sweet-faced minister, and there were few who did not love him. The parish of Poke Island had not drawn the "dead line" in the ministry nor had they harboured the "young-man-for-the-pulpit" craze. He was discussed, of course, and critically analyzed. Spiritually, there was no fault. Corporeally, an erect frame, graceful carriage, a bright intelligent face, a pleasant smile and ready word for all, dignified, but not austere. Even his clothing was beyond reproach; to be sure it was somewhat the worse for wear, but they were neat and the fit was perfect. Besides, the good wife at home had supplied him so well with white ties and linen that he made these the central point of his attire, and all the rest did well as a setting. All these things were noticed and commented on by Poke Island, and the verdict pronounced on the new minister was a favourable one. The standing committee felt that the work of supplying the pulpit was nearly over, and glad they were to be relieved of the task.

On Wednesday of this week Tom Brierly, the local correspondent of the *Jackson Ensign*, went up to Jackson Junction and "dropped in" to see the editor. Brierly had an insatiable love for gossip and even scandal, which made him not only the spice but the terror of the town. His persistency in gathering news for the *Ensign* had won him favour with the editor, and at the same time had led the people of Poke Island to believe that they were of great importance in the world because paraded so often and at such length in the public print. He was willing to write good of any one, but if there could be a little wickedness mixed into any story, it took on an added interest. The wicked tales were those the people talked about the most. Brierly appreciated this fact, and it was this that made him so eager in his work of gathering and culling his weekly news budget for the *Jackson Ensign*.

As Brierly sat down the editor passed a box of cigars and with feet on desk, the two men settled down to a short smoke and gossip; two things which go together even though it be a man who pulls at the cigar. A few moments of silence and smoke—then Brierly began: "Got anything new for the folks this week? The *Ensign's* grown drier than a last year's codfish." "Yes," replied the editor, talking in ejaculatory style between the frequent puffs at his cigar and paying no attention to the criticism on his paper. "There's a rich thing this week, column article, fresh matter, startling news, country wild over it, niece brought it from Barnbury. Ever been up to Barnbury?" Brierly nodded. "Remember stone church on square? Bird store underneath, opposite hotel?" Another nod. "Fun alive there." The editor winked and Brierly grinned. "Minister smart, handsome, built 'em up, big salary, imprudent, faction in church, jealous husband, suit for divorce. How's that? Got it all fresh. Oh, I'll wake things up on the *Ensign* this week."

Puff, puff, puff, and the sanctum is made blue and the men nearly invisible by the smoke. "Editorial?" "Of course," loftily; "sad occurrence, misused power of the clergy, wolf in sheep's clothing, and all that, you know." Again the editor winked and Brierly grinned.

"Where is he now?" "Off on a forced vacation. Reported to be engaged to preach somewhere down along shore." Brierly's round eyes snapped when he heard this. "What sort a looking man is he," he asked. "What's up? Have you seen him?" "P'raps, we've got a parson at Poke Island that hails from Barnbury or somewhere near by." A silence of smoke. Then the editor drew from Brierly all he knew of the Rev. Phineas Dustin. He decided that Brierly should work up the matter at home for the next week's issue, and in tomorrow's paper he would hint at "startling developments in a near-by town on the shore." (To be continued.)

Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS.

LESSON I, October 6, 1889.

THE TRIBES UNITED UNDER DAVID.

2 Sam. v. 1-12.

COMMENTS VERSES 1-3.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!—Ps. cxxxiii. 1.

CENTRAL TRUTH

"Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's, thy God's, and Truth's."

DAILY READINGS.

M. 2 Sam. i. 1-16.

Tu. 2 Sam. ii. 1-11.

W. 2 Sam. ii. 17-30.

Th. 2 Sam. iv. 1-12.

F. 2 Sam. v. 1-12.

Sa. 1 Chron. xi. 1-9.

Su. Ps. xxx. 1-12.

TIME.—B.C. 1048, seven and a half years after Saul's death. David reigned at Hebron seven and a half years, B.C. 1055-1048, when he was made king over all Israel.

PLACE.—(1) Hebron, twenty miles

south of Jerusalem, David's capital while he reigned over Judah. (2) *Jerusalem*, now first brought fully into possession of the Israelites, and made the capital of the united nation.

DAVID.—In the thirty-eighth year of his age, having reigned over Judah alone for seven and a half years. He was the son of Jesse, born in Bethlehem, strong, brave, a soldier, a poet, a musician, a statesman.

PARALLEL ACCOUNTS.—1 Chron. xi. 1-9, and xiv. 1, 2.

ISRAEL AS SAUL LEFT IT.—(1) The country was divided and on the border of a long civil war. (2) It was largely in subjection to Philistine enemies. (3) The state of religion was at a low ebb.

DAVID BECOMES KING OF JUDAH.—Immediately after Saul's death. His capital was at Hebron. The other tribes were led by Abner, the late king's commander-in-chief, to place upon the throne Saul's remaining son, Ishbosheth. His capital was at Mahanaim in Gad, beyond Jordan. For five years Abner was reconquering the country, then Ishbosheth reigned two years. All this time there was a mild civil war. At length Abner revolted to David, and Ishbosheth was murdered.

HELPS UNDER HARD PLACES.—1. All the tribes: 339,600 men and 1224 chiefs (1 Chron. xii. 23-40), a national assembly with their chiefs. *Saying:* they give their reasons. (1) *Thy bone*, etc.: kinship. (2) *Thou leddest out*, etc.: military capacity. (3) *The Lord said:* divine choice. The first and third reasons accord with Deut. xvii. 15. 3. *Made a league before the Lord:* king and people entered into a solemn covenant with God, whose subjects both were. 6. *Jerusalem:* Hebron was too far south for the capital. Jerusalem was the best capital. (1) It was central. (2) It was on the borders of two tribes, and chiefly within Benjamin, the smallest tribe, and therefore the least likely to excite jealousy. (3) It was close by David's own tribe, Judah. (4) As a military post it was unrivalled, being surrounded on three sides by deep ravines. (5) It was selected under divine direction (1 Kings xi. 36). *The Jebusites:* one of the Canaanite tribes. They held the citadel, while Jews and heathen lived in the city below. *Except thou take away*, etc.: better "thou shalt not come thither; but the blind and lame shall keep thee off." They felt that their position was so strong that even blind and lame soldiers could defend it. 8. *Hated David's soul:* the taunt of the Jebusites aroused David's indignation. 10. *David grew great:* (1) He had a united kingdom. (2) He made alliances with some nations. (3) He conquered all the rest. (4) The bounds of the empire were greatly enlarged. (5) There was great wealth and prosperity. (6) There was a wonderful revival of religion, and development of religious institutions.

SUBJECTS FOR SPECIAL REPORTS.—The state of the kingdom as Saul left it.—David's reign at Hebron.—The civil war.—The united kingdom.—Jerusalem.—The capture of the fortress.—What David did to advance the kingdom.—Patriotism.—Why we should love our country.—Religion the basis of prosperity.—What we can do for our country.

QUESTIONS. REVIEW.—Under what circumstances was King Saul slain. Who were the victors? INTRODUCTION.—What book of the Bible do we now study? About whose reign? Give the leading dates. Point out the places on the map. SUBJECT: PATRIOTISM. I. THE STATE OF THE KINGDOM WHEN SAUL DIED.—What enemy was overrunning the country at the time of Saul's death? (1 Sam. xxxi. 1, 7.) What shows that the people were in a divided, unsettled state? (1 Sam. xxx. 2; 1 Chron. xii. 1-23.) What shows that the state of religion was low? (1 Sam. xxii. 18, 19; xxviii. 7.) How long was there civil war? (vs. 5; 2 Sam. iii. 1.) II. DAVID BECOMES KING OF ALL ISRAEL (vs. 1-5).—Of what portion of Israel was David king at first? For how many years? How old was he? Who was trying to rule over the other tribes? (ii. 8-10.) Had the kingdom been promised to David? (1 Sam. xvi. 13.) How many years had David been waiting for the fulfilment of the promise? (From at least B.C. 1065.) Had he been preparing all this time? How were his seven years as king of Judah a preparation for his wider kingdom? (Matt. xxv. 23, 29; Luke xvi. 10.) Who came to make him king over all Israel? (v. 1; 1 Chron. xii. 23-40.) What had become of Ishbosheth? (2 Sam. iv. 5, 6.) What three reasons were given for electing David? (vs. 1, 2.) What is said of the coronation feast? (1 Chron. xii. 38-40.) How long did David reign over all Israel? III. THE NEW CAPITAL (vs. 6-9).—Where did David propose to make his new capital? What were some of the reasons? Who held the fortress at this time? How did David obtain possession of it? What did David do to it? IV. THE NEW NATION (vs. 10-12).—What is said of David's progress? What enemies did he overcome? (viii. 1-14.) How did he improve the government? (viii. 15, 18.) What did he do for religion? (v. 12; vi. 1-5, 13-15; vii. 1, 2; 1 Chron. xv. 16-21. See also his Psalms.) Who helped

him build a palace? (v. 11.) Did David take the glory of all this to himself? (v. 12.)

V. PATRIOTISM.—Was David a true patriot? What is patriotism? Why should we love our country? What are some of the evils to which our country is exposed? What can we do to overcome them? Is a country safe without true religion? What can we do in our own town to help our country? What can we do by home missions? Read some expressions of patriotism. (Ps. cxvii. 6, cxviii. 5, 6, 12; lxx. 1, Jer. ix. 1.) Give some examples of patriotism. (1 Sam. xvii. 32; Nehemiah ii. 2, 3, 11-18; Esther iv. 16.)

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS. I. There are certain evils and dangers in our country, as intemperance, love of money, dishonesty, oppression, selfishness.

II. The true patriot uses every possible means to overcome these evils.

III. Then he waits patiently God's time for triumph.

IV. By doing our own duties well in smaller spheres we find the ways to larger fields.

V. Patriotism is the privilege and duty of all.

VI. Religion in private and in public life is the basis of our country's welfare.

VII. We can aid our country by sustaining and improving the church and Sunday-school, by helping home missions, by favouring good things in all places and at all times.

SABBATH CONVERSATION. THERE is an alarming prevalence of purely worldly conversation among church members on the Lord's Day at the present time. An old story of the good old times, recently republished in the *Sunday-School Times*, illustrates the fact that there has always been too much tendency in this direction. There lived a couple of worthy deacons in little Massachusetts town. Like most orthodox New England deacons, they were exceedingly scrupulous in the fulfilment of all religious duties. They were also great lovers of horse-flesh, and shrewd in the matters of trade.

It chanced on a fine Sabbath morning, so the story goes, as those two deacons drove up to the church door with their families, that Deacon Smith had a new horse, which he had purchased only a few days before. Deacon Jones observed the fact, and took a good look at the animal. Nothing was said at the time; but after the morning service Deacon Jones cautiously approached his brother deacon with the remark: "So you've got a new horse, eh? Quite a fair looking nag, too. If it wasn't the Lord's Day, how would you trade with me?"

"Brother Jones," returned Deacon Smith with just a shade of reproach in his tone, "You know I don't trade horses on the Lord's Day. But, seeing you've mentioned the subject, if it wasn't the Sabbath, I'd like to talk with you. Your horse is a trifle old, you know, and can't do as much as this one. I should probably want \$50 to boot." "If it wasn't Sabbath," rejoined Deacon Jones, "I'd give you twenty-five."

Thus the "dickering" went on. Each time the offer was made with the saving clause, "If it wasn't the Lord's Day," until finally a point of agreement was reached, and it was mutually understood that they should meet on Monday morning and make the trade. Then they went into the church, and slept through the afternoon sermon with a peace only consistent with restful consciences and the assurances that they had strictly observed the sanctity of the Sabbath in all that they had done.

There are too many church members in these days who do not even qualify their worldly conversation by the statement, "If it wasn't the Sabbath." The writer in the *Times*, who quotes the above incident, very truly adds:

"The sanctity of the Sabbath is profaned by worldly conversation as really as by worldly labour. Our conversation and our action are inseparably linked together. We do not wholly lay aside our work so long as our minds are busy thinking and worrying about it. The farmer who talks over plans for the coming week, or discusses the best markets, is really doing a part of his week-day work. The merchant who spends the hours of the Sabbath in reading the latest news of failures or good bargains is saving time, and thus doing a part of his regular daily work. Every one who permits his mind to dwell on secular affairs, and makes them his chief subjects of conversation on the Lord's Day, is bringing in the cares and labours of the week to the exclusion of those higher thoughts and nobler aspirations that ought to fill the sacred hours. The ban was laid upon man's work, not as a privation, but that men might be free to turn their attention wholly to God's work; and this purpose of the Sabbath is frustrated if we occupy our time with worldly thoughts and words. To accomplish its divine purpose, the sanctification of the Sabbath must be complete. Not the hands and feet only, but the mind and the tongue and all the powers, whether physical or mental, must be turned from the things of the world, and consecrated in an especial manner to God. 'Not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.'"—*The Young Christian*.

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