

lously neat. Behind, the mountains towered and had a dark expression.

"Are you going to the post-office?" asked Mrs. Matthews, softly. She knew that perfectly well, but she always asked; he always answered. If it gave her pleasure to inquire, he reasoned, why not?

"Yes, Deborah," said the old man, briskly. "Want to go?"

"I don't know. Is Hezekiah tucked out?"

"Hezekiah is as spry as a chipmunk," returned the minister, confidently. Now Hezekiah was the horse, and thirty-one years old. He received the astonishing tribute with a slow revolution of his best eye (for he was blind in the other).

"Well," said Mrs. Matthews, doubtfully, "I don't know 's I'll go."

She pronounced these words with marked, almost painful, hesitation, in an accent foreign to her environment. They had been Northerners thirty years ago. Weak lungs brought him and these mountain parishes kept him. His usefulness had been so obvious, that his bishop had never shifted him far, reappointing him from term to term within a twenty-mile circuit among those barren fields. The situation was exceptional, the bishop said; at all events, he had chosen so to treat it. Thirty years—and such years!—seemed a long time to stay true to the traditions of youth and a flag. The parishioners and people whom, for courtesy, one called one's neighbours in those desolate, divided mountain homes, expressed themselves variously upon the parson's loyalty to the national cause. The Border State indecision had murmured about him critically, for the immediate region had flashed during the civil war, and remained sulky still.

The Confederacy had never lacked friends in that township. Of late the murmur had become a mutter. The parson had given offence. He had preached a sermon treating of certain disorders which had become historic, for which the village and valley had acquired unenviable notoriety, and which they were slower than some other sections in abandoning, now that the civil situation supposed them to have done so.

"If I thought I could prevent anything," proceeded Mrs. Matthews anxiously, "I'd—I'd—I don't know but I'd go. Are you goin' to hold the meetin', after all?"

"Certainly," replied the minister, lifting his head. "I shall dispense the Word as usual."

"Well," said his wife sadly,—"well, I s'pose you will. I might have known. But I hoped you'd put it off. I was afraid to ask you. I can't help worryin'. I don't know but I'll go, too. I can get my bonnet on in a minute."

Her husband hesitated perceptibly. He did not tell her that he was afraid to take her; that he was almost equally afraid to leave her. He said:

"The lock of the back door isn't mended yet; I don't know but things need watching. That speckled bantam's dreadfully afraid of weasels when she's setting; I don't know 's I blame her."

"Well," returned the old lady with a sigh, "I don't know but