

To the Editors of The Acadian Recorder 1821-22

Letter 1 Gentlemen: Happening one day to call upon Parson Drone, the clergyman of our town, I found him administering his old, standard consolation to my neighbour Solomon Gosling. The parson has been long among us, and is a very good sort of man; but, I believe, he has fared very hardly: for though my townsmen all respect him, and are the most active people in the world at selling watches and swapping horses, they have never made themselves richer and, therefore, have little to give but good wishes. But the parson, except when he is angry, is very good-natured and disposed to bear with a great deal; and, having acquired a large fund of patience himself, he has become a quack at comforting, and prescribes it indiscriminately for all sorts of ills. His own life has been spent between starving and preaching; and having no resources himself, it never occurred to him that, for the wants and troubles of others, there can be any remedy but patience.

My neighbour Gosling is completely an every-day character. His exact likeness may be found at any time, in any part of the Province. About thirty years ago, his father David left him very well to do; and Solomon, who at that time was a brisk young man, had the prospect, by using a little industry, of living as comfortably as any in the town. Soon after the death of old David, he was married and a lifelier couple were not often to be seen. But unluckily for them both, when Solomon went to Halifax in the winter, Polly went along with him to sell her turkeys and see the fashions; and from that day the Goslings had never a day to do well. Solomon was never very fond of hard work. At the same time he could not be accused of idleness. He was always a very good neighbour; and at every burial or barn raising, Solomon was set down as one who would be sure to be there. By these means he gradually contracted the habit of running about; which left his own premises in an unpromising plight. Polly, too, by seeing the fashions, had learnt to be genteel; and for the sake of a little show, both lessened the thrift of the family, and added to the outlay; so that, between one thing and another, Solomon began to be hampered, and had more calls than comforters.

When the troubles of life arise out of idleness, a return to industry is usually the last shift. The habits which my neighbour had been gradually contracting, left him little stomach for the patient and perservering toils of a farming life: nor would urgent necessity permit him to wait for the sure but slow returns of agricultural exertion. But necessity is the mother of invention; and though the family of Goslings were never much noted for profundity of intellect, Solomon, by pure dint of scheming, contrived both to relieve himself from his immediate embarrassments and to avoid hard labour. Though Goose Hill farm, from want to industry, had not been productive, it was still a property of considerable value: and it occurred to Solomon, that, converted into goods, it would yield more prompt and lucrative returns than by any mode of agriculture. Full of the idea, accordingly, my neighbour went to town; and by mortgaging his property to Calibogus, the West India merchant, he returned with a general assortment of merchandise, suited to the wants of the town. When I say a general assortment, it is necessary to be a little more explicit. It did not contain any of those articles which are employed in subduing the forest, or in cultivating the soil. These he knew to be not very saleable. He was aware that though old Tubal Thump supplies the whole town with iron work, he is so miserably poor, that he can scarcely keep himself in materials. The only article of the iron kind which he brought was a hogshead of horse shoes, which a blacksmith in Aberdeen, who knew something of America, had sent out upon speculation. From the number of horses and young people in the township, Solomon knew that horse shoes would meet with a ready sale.

When a merchant lays in his goods he naturally consults the taste of his customers. Solomon's, accordingly, consisted chiefly of West India produce, gin, brandy, tobacco, and a few chests of tea. For the youngsters, he had provided an assortment of superfine broad cloths and fancy muslins, ready-made boots, whips, spurs and a great variety of gumflowers and other articles which come under the

considered as not the least valuable part of his stock, he had bought from Pendulum & Co. a whole box of old watches elegantly ornamented with lacquered brass chains and glass seals; little inferior in appearance to gold and Cairngorms.

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When all these things were arranged, they had a very pretty appearance. For a number of weeks, little was talked of but Mr. Gosling's Store; for such he had, now become by becoming a merchant. Little was to be seen but my neighbours riding thither to buy, and returning with bargains. During the course of the day, long lines of horses, fastened to every accessible post of the fences, rendered an entrance to his house almost impracticable. By these means, the general appearance of the town soon underwent a complete revolution. Homespun and homely fare were to be found only with a few hard-fisted old folks, whose ideas could never rise above labour and saving. The rest appeared so neat and genteel upon Sundays, that even the Reverend Mr. Drone, though I did not see that his flock had enabled him to exchange his own habiliments for Mr. Gosling's superfine, expressed his satisfaction by his complacent looks.

Mr. Gosling, too, had in reality considerably improved his circumstances. The greater part of my neighbours being already in debt to old Ledger and other traders about; and considering that if they took their money to these, it would only go to their credit, carried it to Mr. Gosling's Store; so that by these means he was soon able to clear off a number of his old encumbrances, and to carry to market as much cash as established his credit.

Among traders punctuality of payment begets confidence in the setter; and the credit which this affords to the purchaser, is generally followed by an enlargement of orders. My neighbour returned with a much greater supply; and here his reverses commenced. Credit could not be refused to good customers who had brought their money to the store. Those, also, who formerly showed their good will by bringing their cash, proved their present cordiality by taking large credits. But when the time for returning to the market for supplies arrived, Mr. Gosling had nothing to take thither but his books. These, it is true, had an imposing appearance. They contained debts to a large amount; and my neighbour assured his creditors that, when they were collected, he would be able to pay them all honourably, and have a large reversion to himself. But, when his accounts were made out, many young men who owed him large sums, had gone to Passamaquoddy. Of those who remained, the greater part had mortgaged their farms to Mr. Ledger and the other old traders; and now carried their ready money to Jerry Gawpus, who had just commenced trader by selling his farm. In short, nothing remained for Mr. Gosling but the bodies or labours of his debtors; and these last they all declared themselves very willing to give.

About this time it happened that vessels were giving a great price; and it naturally occurred to my neighbour that, by the labour which he could command, he might build a couple. These, accordingly, were put upon the stocks. But labour in payment of debt, goes on heavily; and besides, when vessels were giving two prices, nobody would work without double wages; so that the vessels, like the ark, saw many summers and winters. In the meantime peace came, and those who owned vessels were glad to get rid of them at any price. By dint of perseverance, however, Mr. Gosling's were finished: but they had scarcely touched the water, when they were attached by Mr. Hemp, who at the same time declared that, when they were sold, he would lose fifty per cent upon his account for the rigging. Such was my neighbour's case when, happening, as I have already mentioned, to step into Parson Drone's, I found that Mr. Gosling had been telling his ailments, and was receiving the reverend old gentleman's ordinary, clerical consolation. "What can't be cured, must be endured: let us have patience."

"I'll tell you what it is, parson," replied my neighbour, "patience may do well enough for those who have plenty: but it won't do for me. Calibogus has foreclosed the mortgage; my vessels are attached; and my books are of no more value than a rotten pumpkin. After struggling hard to supply the country with goods, and to bring up a family so as to be a credit to the town, the country has brought us to ruin. I won't submit to it. I won't see my son Rehoboam, poor fellow, working like a slave upon the roads, with his coat turned into a jacket and the elbows clouted with the tails. My girls were not sent to Mrs. M'Cackle's boarding school to learn to scrub floors. The truth is, parson, the country does not deserve to be lived in.

It is fit only

for Indians, and emigrants from Scotland, who were starving at home. It is time for me to go elsewhere, and carry my family to a place that presents better prospects to young folks."

In reply, the parson was beginning to exhort Mr. Gosling to beware of the 3
murmurings of the wicked; when Jack Catchpole, the constable, stepped in to say that the sheriff would be glad to speak with Mr. Gosling at the door. Our sheriff is a very hospitable gentleman; and, when any of his neighbours are in hardship, he will call upon them, and even insist upon their making his house their home. Nor did I ever know any shy folks getting off with an excuse. As it occurred to me, therefore, that Mr. Gosling might not come back for the parson's admonition, I returned home; and soon learned that my neighbour had really gone elsewhere, and made a settlement in the very place where Sampson turned miller. This event has not added much to the respectability of the Goslings; nor is it calculated to brighten their prospects. My neighbour's children are as fine a young family as any in the town; but it unavoidably happened, that the apparent prosperity of thier father introduced among them habits, not very friendly to regular industry and saving. Hob Gosling, the oldest son, is really a smart young fellow; and in haying time or harvest, he can do more work in a day than any three labourers. But hard work requires recreation; and when a young man does any thing uncommon, he wishes to receive credit for it among his neighbours. Accordingly, it would sometimes happen, that it would take Hob a week to tell about the exertions of a day. He would also occasionally recreate himself by riding races, or playing a game at cards when he was drinking a glass of grog with other youngsters over Mr. Tipple's counter: and by these means, though Hob is not a quarrelsome young man, his name was frequently called over in court in assault and battery cases. This, it is true, was not without its advantages. Hob acquired a great knowledge of the law, and the character of being a 'cute young man. But I am inclined to think that the gain ended here; for I remember that after one or two of these causes were tried, a few acres of Mr. Gosling's best marsh passed into the hands of Saunders Scantocreesh, a hard-faced, hard-working Scotchman, who, a few years ago, came among us with his stockings and shoes suspended from a stick over his shoulder, but now possesses one of the best farms in the town.

My neighbour's daughters, too, are very agreeable young ladies. Everybody allows that Mrs. M'Cackle has done justice to their education. For painting flowers and playing upon the pianoforte, they have few equals. Some of my neighbours, indeed, used to complain that, when Mr. Gosling asked them to dinner, the meat was always ill-cooked, and the puddings and pies mere dough; but the reason was, that neither Mrs. Gosling nor the young ladies could get the black wench to do as she was bidden, unless they were always at her heels.

But this was not the only hardship which my neighbour suffered by the elegant accomplishments of the young ladies. To be genteel in the country, is attended with difficulties and losses of which you townfolks can have no conception. Morning visits in the afternoon, dressings and other things, interrupted so frequently with rural industry, that great show and sad accidents are usually combined. I recollect when Jacob Ribs married his fourth wife, Mr. and Mrs. Gosling were invited to the wedding; and as it happened to be on churing day, the young ladies were left to look after the butter-making. But, when the chaise which carried the old folks to the marriage returned, it occurred to the young ladies, that, before proceeding to domestic toil, they would have plenty of time to return Miss Trotabout's last morning visit; and off they set, leaving directions with the black girl to have the churn before the fire by the time they returned. During their absence, it unfortunately happened that the wench descried one of her black cronies passing; and, running down the lane to enjoy a little talk, left the kitchen door open, when Mr. Gosling's boar pig Mammoth, who was always a mischievous brute, finding a clear passage, entered without ceremony and upset the churn. My neighbour's kitchen was immediately converted into the country of the Gadarenes. To guzzle up the contents, was but the work of a moment. The succeeding scarcity, also aroused that inquisitive disposition for which swine, as well as ladies, are noted; when one of the vile animals, perceiving something in the churn as it lay upon its side, thrust in its snout to examine. In this state of things, the black wench, having descried the young ladies at a distance, returned to her post. Vengeance succeeded

amazement; and the first object of it, and apparently the most guilty, was the individual whose fore-quarters had already passed from observation. Now, it so happens that no way has yet been invented to drive a pig straight forward, but to pull it by the tail. As soon, therefore, as it found itself assaulted behind, the unclean beast made a fair entrance into the wooden tabernacle; and, when the young ladies returned to make butter, it was rolling round the floor, to the utter dismay of the girl, and complete discomfiture of the whole herd of swine. From such trials as these, you townsfolks, who have nothing else to do but be genteel, are altogether exempted.

After Mr. Gosling's unfortunate confinement, I went to call upon his family, imagining that the countenance of an acquaintance would help to soothe and keep up their spirits. Parson Drone, too, had prepared a long discourse upon patience, and was come to deliver it. But we found them all very cheerful; and the parson unwilling to lose his labour, made his visit short, and carried his discourse to old Caleb Stagers, whose mare had just died of the botts. Mr. Gosling's confinement they considered merely as a temporary inconvenience, arising from the spite of his creditors. But when his debts were called in, he would pay everybody; and the whole family agreed that, then, with the rest of his property, they would go to a country better worth the living in. I found among them, however, a diversity of opinion about where this should be. Mrs. Gosling spoke of the Ohio; but Mr. Rehoboam declared that it was a new country, without roads; where a young man could not lay a leg over a saddle from the one year's end to the other. Miss Dinah preferred the Cape of Good Hope, but she was afraid of the Caffres, who sometimes carry off white women. To elope with a lord of a duke, she observed, would be a very pretty incident, but should any person ever write a novel about the Goslings, to be carried off by a Hottentot would appear so droll. Upon the whole, they seemed to think the opinion of Miss Fanny most feasible: that it would be best to go to Botany Bay, where every genteel family like the Goslings, receives so many white niggers, sent out every year from Britain by Government for the supply of the colony.

As your warriors for the winter have not yet opened their campaign, I hope you will find room in your paper for the preceding account of my neighbour and his family. It will not, I know, be very interesting to your readers in general; for they have all seen the like, and heard the like a hundred times before; and as it is no fable but a true story they will not be able to deduce from it any sage moral for their own direction in life. Yet its insertion will oblige a great many of your readers. By looking over the list of your subscribers, you will see that the Gosling family have extensive connexions in every part of the province and in every kind of occupation; and I am sure it will gratify them all to hear how their relation Mr. Solomon is getting on. Should you oblige them and myself thus far, I may be induced to sent you, at some future period, the sequel of my neighbour's trading career.

MR. SOAKEM, THE TAVERN-KEEPER

from letter three

Another of the sheriff's lodgers is Mr. Soakem, the tavern-keeper. Like the rest of us, he began the world by settling upon a farm. At first, he was a hard-working man, and soon made himself comfortable. But he was very eager to be rich, and he would frequently compare his hard labour with his little gains, as he called them. At last, one day, passing Mr. Tipple's, and observing the great number of horses which were fastened to the fence, it occurred to him that a large proportion of the township passed by his house, and he might as well keep tavern as not. He would mind the business of the farm, and Mrs. Soakem would attend to the travellers. Accordingly, he applied for license in the usual way.

When our parson, who was then young and spry, heard of it, he used every argument in his power to dissuade him. He begged him to consider what religion could be in a family, open at all hours, to all kinds of company. He entreated him to reflect upon the influence which the profligate conduct of vagabonds must have upon his children. He told him that a person entering upon any line of life should view those who are in it, and asked him, how he would like to see himself and his family like Tipple. He conjured him to prefer his religious character and prospects to a little wealth with such fearful hazards. And lastly, he denounced that, where one man's sin is another man's gain, the judgment of God is the amount of the profit.

Still, Mr. Soakem was not convinced. Houses of entertainment were necessary, and might be very decently kept by religious people; and he hoped that the parson knew him better than to compare him to Tipple. When Mr. Drone found his arguments fruitless, he applied to the magistrates. He told them that taverns are at best but necessary nuisances, and ought not to be multiplied. He bid them look round the township, and see how many had been ruined by living in their neighbourhood. And as he got on, becoming gradually more earnest, he said they had received His Majesty's commission for better purposes, than to grant a license to every fool who chose to ruin himself and his family; that they were the guardians of good order; and, that, if they placed temptations in the way of the unwary, they were the partakers of other men's sins; and might assure themselves that the gall and wormwood would be shared between them. 5

Our magistrates have always been in the practice of giving licenses to all who request them. The town, they say, needs the license money; and, if the taverns increase too much, those who keep them, will get tired of the business. They were, therefore, not well-pleased that Parson Drone should interfere, and pretend to instruct them in their official duties. They never meddled with his preaching, and he had no right to interfere with them. Hence, partly at the solicitation of Mr. Soakem, and partly from opposition to the parson, the license was granted.

When Mr. Soakem opened his house of entertainment, he was eager to get rich. At the same time, he was really an industrious honest man; and he commenced with a firm determination to show Parson Drone and the whole town, that he was a different man from Tipple, and kept another sort of a house. Accordingly, as his character was known, everything at first went admirably on. The young folks went where they could get card-playing and fun; and nobody lodged at Mr. Soakem's tavern, except those sober travellers who wished to take their glass moderately and quietly after the fatigues of the day. As his custom was thus small, and [the] whole attention of the family directed to have everything clean and comfortable, travellers never failed to be pleased; and, frequently, to show their satisfaction, as Mr. Soakem was a very conversable man, they would invite him to chat an hour with them and take a glass of grog.

When there happens to be a good tavern upon the road, everybody soon knows of it. Mr. Soakem's trade began to enlarge very fast. This produced a corresponding exertion to please; and everybody was pleased. About this time I observed, that, from the attention which the tavern required, my neighbour's farm did not look so well as it used to do. From the hurry of travellers, also, family prayers and graces would be sometimes hurried over, and sometimes omitted; but, at first, this only happened in unavoidable cases.

Mr. Soakem was now in prosperous circumstances, and making money very fast. Whether it was on account of his good conduct, or because he was getting rich, I cannot exactly say; but he began to be very much respected, and his friends thought him well-qualified to be one of the justices for the town. He was no longer plain Boniface, but Mr. Soakem; and I have even seen some of his letters from your town merchants, with, Esq[uire] to his name. Mr. Soakem, having thus acquired much respectability, now studied to conduct himself with the decent dignity which became him. Instead of bustling about, as formerly, when a traveller arrived, to get everything comfortable, as his children were now growing up and should learn to do something, the horses were left to the boys, and the girls had the cooking and other indoor affairs. Mrs. Soakem, too, began to assume a lady-like deportment; and though the very best of you Halifax gentry had stopped at the door, she would not have budged from her seat.

With this new arrangement travellers were not always satisfied, and like the discontented in all ages, they looked back with regret to good old times. They complained that, in the house, there were far more attendants than service; and whether it was that the boys had given the horses too much to eat, they could never get them to start from the door without a good deal of whipping and spurring. With these things, it must be confessed, Mr. Soakem was altogether unacquainted, for on account of the enlargement of his business and other causes, he was often from home.

I do not know how it is in Halifax; but, in the country, it is really

a great hardship to be a respectable gentleman. Such a person, for the sake of character, must do a great many things which he would otherwise avoid. Accordingly, when Mr. Soakem was abroad, in order to maintain his reputation, he would stop at every tavern on the road, and show how a gentleman ought to behave. In the meantime, the young people were left to manage both the farm and the house of entertainment. This was more than they could well do; and, besides, not very consistent with sober and industrious habits. They had learned, also, whose children they were. Now, this kind of knowledge never fails to influence strongly the conduct of youth. They did not see why Mr. Soakem's children should be always drudging upon a farm like beasts, or be the servant of every fellow who chose to come along the road. Of course, when their father was from home, and he was from home very often, they would visit their companions, and their companions would visit them; and travellers, understanding how things stood, passed on to the New Inn about half a mile distant. In short, Mr. Soakem's gradually became like the habitation of the wicked. He was rarely in it himself; his children were always strolling about; and no traveller came near it; when, at last, one day the sheriff calling and finding him at home, remarked, that he must now be very lonely, and insisted upon introducing him to the company in which I found him. 6

I remember, when Mr. Soakem began to keep tavern, it happened to be the subject of conversation between Parson Drone and myself. "I'll tell you," says he, "Mr. Stepsure, how it will turn out." (Among the neighbours I am plain Mephibosheth, but he called me Mr. Stepsure.) "I'll tell you, Mr. Stepsure, how it will turn out. Our neighbour Soakem is a well-meaning, decent man; but eager to be rich, and totally ignorant of the influence of external circumstances upon human character and conduct. He is determined to keep tavern. A tavern must be open at all hours, and to all kinds of company. Irregularity in eating and sleeping requires the comfort of drinking. In a family, too, the want of good order destroys all personal and family religion; and, when our neighbour's children are deprived of his present good example, they will learn to imitate his guests. In short, Mr. Soakem, between tasting at home and drinking abroad, will become a mere sot. His fine family of children will be the prey of ill example and idleness; and Mrs. Soakem, poor woman, who dreams of being rich, will come upon the town. It is well for you, Mr. Mephibosheth Stepsure, that you are lame of both feet, and cannot run about like the rest of the town. They are a bustling, bargaining, running-about sort of folks. But depend upon it, it is, as the wise man says, a sore travail and an evil disease. I have generally seen, that he who, instead of minding his farm, is always running about, needs a long rest at last; but, instead of running home to get it, he stops at the sheriff's."

Accordingly, Mr. Soakem's boys are mere lazy, drunken vagabonds. His daughters, too, who are really finelooking girls, have become pert, idle hussies, without industry and economy. Mrs. Soaken, through the misfortunes of the family, has lost all heart to well-doing; for, what can a woman in such circumstances do? And, when I arrived at the sheriff's, I found Mr. Soakem with eyes like collops, poring upon the cards, and the grog before him.

FROM LETTER FOUR

But, overlooking in the meantime, the rest of my townsmen, I shall just introduce to you Mr. Pat O'Rafferty, our schoolmaster, who had become their companion in the sheriff's. Pat was born in the county of Tipperary; and, as he said himself, came of a genteel family; for his father's establishment consumed more buttermilk and potatoes than any of the neighbours. In due time he was put to school, and learned to write a good hand; which so pleased his father, that the old gentleman told him one day that he was resolved to make him a priest. Pat said he did not like to be a Holy Father; because he liked July O'Flanagan; but if his father wished him to be a spiritual man, he had no objection to be clerk to Mr. Wort at the whiskey distillery. To

the distillery, accordingly, he went; and in a short time, was the best judge of whiskey about. Pat married Judy, and they soon loved each other so well, as to be rarely without the proofs of mutual affection: Judy had black eyes; and Pat a great many scratches. In the course of clerking, also, he became so dexterous, that he would write all that he was ordered and sometimes a little more. This could not be long done without his master getting notice of it; and when Mr. Wort heard of it, he was so full of it himself, that he could not avoid telling the whole affair to his friend Justice Choakem. The Justice was a curious sort of man; and whenever anything out of the common road was done, the person who did it, was sure to be sent for and rewarded. He, therefore, expressed a very strong wish to see Pat, and to prevent disappointment, the best way, he thought, would be to issue a warrant.

Besides being a great rewarder of merit, the Justice loved bacon better than any other kind of food. In order, therefore, to have it to his taste, he was in the practice of curing his own ham. Now, it happened one day, that, when His Worship was thinking about a large hog which he had lately purchased, a servant stepped in and told him, that he was just come; and, said he, "a stout fellow he is; for he took three of us to bring him along." The Justice immediately ordered to kill and hang him up; but, when the servant returned to see what they should do next, it turned out to be Teddy O'Leary who had been sent for, to show the squire how he contrived to make the neighbour's hens disappear when he pleased. Pat heard that Justice Choakem wanted to speak with him, and would have very gladly obliged his honour; but he was not willing to run such fearful risks. He, therefore, shipped himself off for Newfoundland where he amused himself all summer with cod-fishing. Here, though the grog in summer was very much to his taste, the prospect of starving in winter was not so comfortable. This induced him, with a cargo of his countrymen, to land upon our coast, late in the fall, a few years ago. Pat found his way to our town. As there is among us a general taste for education, we employed him to communicate to our youth the true tone and accent of the English language. Here he naturally lodged with Mr. Tipple. But, though he paid punctually for the grog (for Tipple gives no credit), his board for some time was entirely overlooked by them both. At last Mr. Tipple, being anxious to preserve the reputation of his house, and to guard the town against the ill example of drunkards, begged the sherriff to take charge of him and prevent him from going at large.

FROM LETTER TWO

About ten years ago, Jack Scorem began in the world, by settling upon a wood lot and marrying a daughter of old Pharaoh Squash. With the exception of rather more legs than one human body has a right to claim, Jack was a likely, clever-handed fellow, and could chop more in a day than any of his neighbours. But this was a kind of work,

of which, except at a chopping frolic, he was never very fond. His wife, too, barring a little glibness of tongue, common to the whole Squash family, was a very engaging and smart young woman.

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Jack, having begun the world, was determined to show that he had begun it in earnest. Accordingly, after making a little hole in the woods, that nobody might mistake him for a Pictou highlandman, he raised a couple of good frames for his house and barn; and, by chopping for Swing the sawyer, provided himself with as many boards as would do the outside work of his house. Mr. Ledger, too, who was never known to refuse credit to active, well-doing young men, supplied him with paint, glass, nails, and other materials; so that very soon by dint of labour and the help of a carpenter to make the sashes, the house that Jack built, with its white clapboards and green corners and window facings, had a very pretty appearance. The partitions and ceilings, it is true, were only loose boards, but those he resolved to have finished before the winter set in.

When things were in this state, Mrs. Scorem was brought home from her father's; and a happier couple were nowhere to be found. Jack was very fond of his wife; the neighbours, too, were very kind in visiting and inviting the young folks, so that the time slipped pleasantly away. But winter set in before he could get anything done to the house; and when he began to look after boards for his barn, there were none to be got. The young folks, however, were not easily put out. A few slabs would do very well to shelter the cow in a corner of the frame; and, if their house was cold, they were near the woods, and could keep a rousing fire.

But Jack's building had produced another inconvenience of much greater magnitude. A few potatoes were the whole of his crop. Everything, therefore, must be bought at the store; and as young folks like to be stylish, the day of reckoning was not duly considered. When the spring came, Mr. Ledger had a very long account against Jack: but then his farm showed that, during winter, he had been doing something besides visiting; he had slashed down a large piece of wood; and now, he determined to raise a crop which would do something for him in the fall.

It happened that spring, that Mr. Ledger's agent at home sent him out more vessels than he knew well how to load. Jack was in debt, and known to be a good axeman; and just when he was beginning to clear up his new land, Mr. Ledger's tempting offers interrupted the farming. He might jump into the woods in the morning, and at night return home two or three dollars the richer. This was a prospect not to be despised by one who was in debt; and besides; wished to have his house and barn finished.

It happened, also, that when Mr. Ledger's vessels came out, they brought a very large importation of goods. These proved a sore temptation to Jack and Mrs. Scorem; who like other young folks, had gone very bare together. But he was now making great wages, and they could well afford both to live better and dress better; and hence between finery and their summer's provisions, they had a great many errands to the store. In the meantime, Jack wrought very hard and finished his contract, but when Mr. Ledger balanced his

books, he was astonished to find himself deeper in debt than before. At first he was very angry, and would not believe it. But in looking over the account, he found a great many gowns, ribbons, and laces, which, he thought, might have been spared. He had also some twinges about a long line of dittos, headed by 1 gallon spirits. But he liked to see his wife as fine as any of her neighbours; and it would be a miserable thing if he could not afford a glass of grog to an acquaintance when he called at the house. In short, the thing was done and could not be recalled. Still he was a smart young fellow, and had no need to resort to Parson Drone for consolation. The house and barn could stand for a year; and, instead of chopping upon his far, he could have another great lot of timber ready by the spring. 9

The little timber which had been upon Jack's premises, was now gone. But my cousin, Harrow, who lives at the far end of the settlement, and minds only his farming, had an excellent lot of it; and Jack and a few more of the youngsters agreed to pay him stumpage and make one job of the whole. As they were all far from home, it was necessary to camp in the woods. Now, sleeping upon spruce boughs and living upon hard biscuit and salt pork not very well cooked, do not afford all the comfort requisite for hard-working men. Without a little spirits, the fatigue of lumbering would be intolerable. Besides, persons who must quit their labour at dusk, cannot sleep all the long nights of winter; and, when they are sitting in the camp, they need something along with a game of cards, to make them cheery and keep out the cold.

In the meantime, Mrs. Scorem and the wives of the other young men, found themselves very lonely at home. They also felt a little anxious about their husbands; and to relieve their uneasiness, they naturally called upon each other, for the double purpose of passing a dull hour and hearing from the camp. Calls of this kind require comforts; and, as young folks have usually a frank disposition, it became a point of emulation among them, who should be kindest. Jack, thus living in the woods, had now, as it were, two families to support; and each of them conducted upon the supposition that he was making great wages and could very easily afford it.

The large lot of timber was at last made and delivered. But when a deduction was made for hauling and stumpage, and also the price of a horse to carry his provisions, for all which Mr. Ledger was bound, the remainder left Jack farther in arrears than ever. At first he was confounded. A perusal of Mr. Ledger's account, however, satisfied him that all was fair and square. The number of dittos in his present account, had been considerably increased by camping in the woods; but he now found for these a reasonable excuse; they were a part of his supplies, and could not be wanted. The same leniency he found it impossible to extend to many of Mrs. Scorem's items; and on returning home, ill-pleased and moody, he could not avoid muttering something about extravagance, tea, and trumpery. In a case of this kind, it was never known that any of the Squash family did not give as good as they got. Mrs. Scorem, therefore, could quote with great readiness the amount of Jack's dittos; so that domestic comfort began to assume a very gloomy appearance. But, as neither of them were ill-natured, after a few tears and a little

outing from Mrs. Scorem, harmony was restored; and they both fully resolved to be more careful in future, and get out of debt as soon as they could. To get out of debt, however, by farming, was now out of the question. Another great lot of lumber must, therefore, be made.... * * * * *

In this manner Jack's affairs went on for several years more. Lots of timber were made, and large debts contracted. In the meantime, the lumbering life had left the farm without improvement. The land which Jack had chopped the winter after his marriage, was again covered with fine young wood. The barn frame, it is true, for it was an excellent frame, has resisted the weather, and still stood its ground; but the house could no longer be known by its fine white clapboards and its green corners and facings. Time had swept away all the paint, and the only contrast to its general weather-beaten appearance was a strip of white, reaching from the garret window to the ground, occasioned by certain nocturnal distillations, which, on a cold winter's night, it is not always convenient to carry to the door. His windows, too, had suffered the inconvenience of being in the neighbourhood of children and fowls. The want of glass was remedied by a plentiful supply of old hats, trousers, and the like; at the same time keeping out the cold, and proving that those within had once worn clothes.

From what I have said respecting the outside of the house, it need scarcely be remarked, that comforts had not multiplied within. The loose boards had become looser by seasoning. The increase of children, also, had opened up new sources of want; and it usually happens, that large wants very injudiciously keep company with little credits. When Jack, therefore, returned home from the woods, it was to hear of a long list of particulars which the family needed, summed up with a good deal of grumbling that they had not been provided. Now, family conversations of this kind, when they are often repeated, are apt to become irksome. All persons, also, married and unmarried, contract a habit of going where they are most comfortable. From such matrimonial communings, therefore, Jack used to escape to his acquaintances, who neither told him of wants nor plagued him with grumbings; and, as they were commonly to be found about Mr. Tipple's counter, he became a regular attendant at that place of amusement. A course of this kind was not likely to lessen family grievances. Jack and Mrs. Scorem began to live very unhappily together. That he might forget the past and escape the present, a resort to Mr. Tipple's became every day more necessary; and the thought of returning home, demanded an additional dose to fortify him against the reception of Mrs. Scorem.

I have generally seen that misfortune, which requires a stout heart and strong exertions to overcome it, produces contrary effects. Accordingly, as Jack's prospects of comfort diminished, he became less inclined to labour for comfort; and was no longer that active, hard-working fellow which he had formerly been. In the meantime, from the failure of trade and other circumstances, the price of timber fell so much that Jack declared it better to go idle than to work for such wages. Go idle he did; but, when he was enjoying himself, Mr. Ledger sued out the mortgage, and then captivated him for the balance of the account; and he is now living with the sheriff, till trade revives and

labour returns to its old price. Before I left him, his little boys were at my house, asking a few potatoes to keep them from starving; and when I arrived at Mr. Holdfast's, I found Jack's thoughts and enjoyments limited to a game at cards and a glass of grog. By publishing this, you may encourage me to introduce you to the rest of the company.

11

FROM LETTER NINE

The man who settles upon a wood lot, has a good deal to do the first year; and if he be not disposed to get into debt, he must take care to lose no time. Yet, if he employ himself with ordinary judgment and steadiness, it is wonderful how much he will do, without doing great days' work. After getting in my seed, I began to think about my house and barn. By the help of the squire's team I had got the logs upon the spot (for I could not, like Jack Scorem, venture upon two frames); and just when I was considering who would help me put them up, young Loopy came up. Loopy lived then, as he does now, in a little log hut, covered with spruce bark. Neither the outside or inside of it, I recollect, presented any inducement to visit twice. His door was always beset by a couple of starved pigs, which occupied this station for the double purpose of enjoying the benefit of the puddle, and of being at hand to make good their entrance when the door happened to be opened.

Loopy and his wife were good-looking, flashy, young people; and, on Sundays and other public occasions, few dressed better, or carried their heads higher. But, in speaking of them, our old parson used to say, that if you trace a butterfly to its shell, you will find it a maggot; and sure enough, if there was any comfort or cleanliness about Loopy's house, the pigs had got them. His whole furniture was a large looking-glass, a cross-legged table, a few broken chairs, a number of nails driven into the walls; and for a bed, a couple of blankets laid upon a little straw. As his articles were few, they were of course pretty much used. Mrs. Loopy was frequently from home, and required to be dressed. On this account the eating apparatus was not much looked after. They usually stood upon the table, amidst scraps of pork or fish and piles of potato skins; of which, also, the chairs had usually a proportion. The nails were very useful for keeping their clothes out of the pigs' way; and for showing how many gowns, petticoats, trousers, and other finery, the young people had got. As for the bed, it was in constant use; and served the whole family. In Loopy's it was a standing order, that the dog jumped out, and Loopy and his wife jumped in. When he was finely dressed, I remember, he had a particular way of twisting his shoulders. Not that he carried any of his stock about with him; for I never knew him have more than one cow and the two pigs; except when he happened to be in the horse trade. But some people's clothes, you know, do not sit easily upon them; and then they are fidgetty. I make this remark, because many flashy young people may think that I am pointing at them; when I am only describing Loopy, who came past at the time that I was thinking how I should get up my log house and barn.

Loopy, stopping a little for the purpose of offering me a great bargain of a horse, gave me a very discouraging view of the farming life. "I'll tell you," said he, "Meph, what it is; you have got a world of hard work before you. Upon my word, the

farmer has a laborious life of it. I do assure you, it takes a great deal of toiling to maintain a family by a farm; and after all, it won't do." But, as Loopy had never been guilty of working hard, he could not know the toil of it only by tradition, which is not a very sure guide. I was not, therefore, discouraged completely, though I refused the horse; and, when he left me to call upon his aunt, Mrs. Grumble, I began the preparation for getting up my house and barn.

A log house is easily managed; and where its owner has any taste, it is susceptible of a degree of neatness and comfort, which comparatively few farmers of this country can afford to display in a larger building. For example, my neighbour Pumpkin, whose ideas were always large, in order that his building might correspond with his farm, raised a huge frame; and really, when the outside was finished, it had an imposing appearance. Travellers admired it very much, and Pumpkin himself, from the praise bestowed upon his good taste, began to look big. But, in building the outside to please travellers, he forgot that he had the inside to build for the comfort of his family. As I formerly stated, much of his farming labour is expended in hunting the cattle from his large fields, on this account he was never very foxhanded; and, when passengers were admiring Mr. Pumpkin's fine house, he and his family were living in a corner of it, which had been partitioned off by a few loose boards. The rest of the building was found very handy for holding odd things. Now, about a farmhouse, this is a discovery which the owner cannot keep to himself. Pigs, dogs, carts, and fowls, all make it and make use of it too; and my neighbour's house, besides the finery of the young ladies, suspended upon nails and pegs around the walls, generally contained a great variety of articles and smells, very useful to a farmer. Pumpkin had resolved to finish by degrees; but fighting against time is a hard battle. The other day I had occasion to pass by his house, and came home very thankful to Providence, as I have often been, for my lame legs. I found the family, emptying the windows of the old hats and trousers; and one of his sons, who was tearing the clapboards from the end of the house, told me, that had I been anything else than a lame old rascal, he would have given me a beating. By the by, since I wrote you about Jack Scorem's house, there has been sad havoc among the clapboards in our town. Some of the youngsters have got wooden spouts erected; which you will see standing out from the houses, when you come up the country. How the rest intend to conduct the distillation in future, I have not yet learned. But, with the exception of Jack's house, and those of old Stot, Ehad Slush, and one or two more, the buildings of the town are very much altered.

Where everything is done in a hurry, according to the old farming, there are a great many little things omitted, because they can be done at any time. For example, when a new settler builds a log house, he often leaves the ground about his door in a state of nature; and the chimney top, or roof, or the corners, remain unfinished. This part of the old system, my master could never endure; and, indeed, I have generally seen, that, where these things are without, there is a corresponding want of comfort within. The farmer who does not finish his jobs, has either too many of them for his profit, or wants that industry which ensures comfort. I therefore,

finished my house as it ought to be; and, by doing so, found myself a gainer. The additional labour was trifling. In return for this trifling labour, I was relieved equally from smoke and puddle; and when my neighbours, in their large open houses, were shivering before huge fires in winter, my little hut well-stuffed with moss, rendered me snug with a small quantity of fuel.

FROM LETTER 10

Still it must be confessed, that neither my industry nor my industry nor made me so comfortable as I wished to be. In the long winter nights, I felt at times very lonely; and, though I dreaded neither ghost nor witch, I often wished I had somebody along with me. In such a case I usually stepped over to widow Scant's, and spent a spare hour. The widow was a sensible and cheerful woman, and in her company, the time passed so agreeably, that, occasionally, she would be obliged to remind me that the night was getting late. . . .

About the commencement of my second summer's vacation, Parson Drone was settled among us. As I told you before, he then preached a sermon which proved to my satisfaction that it is not good to be alone; and, having always a disposition to enjoy as many comforts as possible, I married the widow's daughter Dorothy. The habit of visiting them had become so inveterate, that I could not do without them. I, therefore, concluded, that to have them in my house would save me much time and trouble; and so I got a wife. For many years I liked Dorothy, and Dorothy liked me; not because I was a handsome figure on the floor at a frolic: for when my wife was born, the graces, who had been invited to the ceremony, fled with precipitation as soon as they saw them; and, on this account, I was never a great dancer. Indeed, the High-Fling was the only dance of which I could make any hand. Dorothy liked me, because I was a sober, industrious lad, of a nature and kind to her mother. . . .

My spouse was a good-looking little woman, but as unattractive as the young ladies of these days as our townsman Tim is wont to call Peter Longshanks. Females, nowadays, have lost all attractions but length. The time has been when I could have carried any of them around me with my finger and thumb. Dorothy was a round-faced, red-cheeked, junky little woman, but had good bottom in her too, I assure you; for I recollect very well, that, when I used in those days to lift her over a step, she was a good heavy load for any ordinary working man. About the bride's dress I shall say but little. Dorothy had neither gumflower nor notion of any kind. Still, she had some decent clothes, such as became the daughter of a widow; and they were paid for too.

As for our wedding, nobody was present but the parson and my good old master and mistress, who always rejoiced in my prosperity. Among us it is the practice to set off the young man with a general meeting of the town, and a dinner which would keep the new-married couple comfortable for a great many months; and, though starvation should follow, this must be omitted. But such feasting I could ill afford. Besides, though I, as well as my neighbours, liked a good dinner, I was sure that Dorothy and I would come so well on with the other part of the business. Some of the youngsters told me they wished to come to the marriage, and get a little fun; but, though I assured them that I would be as glad as ever to see them, none of them came. They expected, I suppose, that I would give them another word of sermon.

LETTER FROM "CENSOR" Halifax, December 24, 1822

MESSRS. EDITORS: My last letter was short, and I do not mean that this should be a long one. The public of late years has been so much cloyed with epistles lengthened out to three or four columns of close printing, that their fatigued appetite prefers a neat little high-seasoned dish to a luxurious entertainment of three courses. Moreover, this wordiness of diction is objected, as it was, with a paucity of incidents and characters

was a leading fault of the letters which are to be the objects of my present criticism. Longinus in his discourse on the Sublime (I quote from a translation, for I am ignorant of the original—a piece of information perhaps, which it would have been prudent to conceal) states it as a great beauty in a critic, to write his remarks and animadversions in a strain which will fitly exemplify the manner of composition that he is to praise or blame. As I disapproved much of the length of Stepsure's letters, especially as the author obviously laboured to draw them out into unconscionable prolixity, and seemed to have tasked himself, not to stop when his materials were spent, but to fill up his complement of verbose chit-chat among his characters; it would be highly censurable in me to run into this error, and tire him and my readers with a like repetition of dullness. On this account I shall confine myself at present to less than two columns of your weekly paper. But I have begun at the wrong end; as in justice I ought first to point out the merits of these letters on our domestic manners.

It is confessed by all ranks, that the province stood much in need of the severe chastisement which was applied by this corrector of morals. Our country people unquestionably set a false estimate on their time, which to the lower and middling classes, is equal in value to money. They spent it without thought: and in place of employing it in the improvement of their farms, squandered it shamefully in riding about on horse-back or in gigs and sleighs, in frolics, in lounging about the smith's shop, and in tippling. . . .

They were no less lavish of what money came into their possession, than of their time. A taste for show, finery and expense swallowed up, like Aaron's rod, the virtues of prudence and economy. Our farmers seem incapable of keeping one farthing beside them. Avarice is none of the vices of this generation; for no sooner is a dollar got than it is gone. We have many characters among us who drive their gigs with plated harness every day, that six months in the year rise of a morning without twenty shillings of paper, silver or gold at their command. This is a disgraceful state of society, and shows that extravagance is too predominant among us. We dress, eat and drink above our circumstances, and are engaged in a constant race with poverty and the sheriff. The whole price obtained for the farm produce brought to Halifax is by most people laid out on goods of one kind or another before they quit the town, and they return home as penniless as they came. The circulating medium is therefore centred about the capital; and the country is devoid of all specie for the purposes of exchange. Common transactions are done in barter, and debts of whatever standing are nearly irrecoverable. Few people pay anything, till they are quickened by the compulsion of law. Nothing can account for this, but the wasteful habits of the people. They live on the very verge of their incomes; and any credit they may have is employed in procuring additional gratifications, which otherwise could not be reached.

If you meet our farmers at church or market, attending courts of justice or travelling on a journey whether of pleasure or business, you would fancy them to be gentlemen of moderate fortunes, so imposing are their dress, equipage and appearance; but if you have any dealings with them, the delusion ceases, and you behold the nakedness of the land. The common beggars in the streets of London have more ready cash than they: for on their backs and bellies the last shilling is expended. Saunders Scantocreech's stocking of doubleblossoms has no parallel out of the township of our author, and everywhere else would be a fiction. To correct these faults in our manners was a laudible design, and the execution of the papers was such as in a great measure to attain the end in view.

LETTER I / GENTLEMEN: Since Censor gave me the fearful heckling which, I dare say, some of your readers have not forgotten, . . . I have begun to chew the cud of disappointment and humiliation; and it is, I assure you, a bitter kind of work. When any person issuing from a cottage, has crept in among great folks, and just nestled himself comfortably, it is a mortifying thing to be told that he is no gentleman. . . .

Who Censor is, it would be of no use to inquire. . . .

Censor has told everybody that I am so filthy and stink so abominably, that no genteel nose can ever come near me. "Stepsure is constantly wading in a dung-pit, bespattered with dirt and all the marks of vulgarity," and on this account, I and my letters must "ever be refused admittance into the drawing room of polite life." On the other hand, Censor is a cleanly man, as cleanly as soap suds and scrubbing can make him, and whenever he pleases, he can step softly into the drawing room, and lay his hand upon lovely woman with a lover's softness. To me all this is exceedingly humiliating, for it is exceedingly true. Last fall, I had a great deal of work about a large pit for catching the drippings of our cattle; and you may depend upon it, there was a good deal of wading. As for my hands, being something of the size and colour of smoked hams, I doubt if their softness would be agreeable to lovely women; particularly in that moulting state which Censor has so pathetically deplored. In my letters, too, I did record filthy things about the houses of our town, some on the outside and others within; and you see that Censor, who has lived all his life in a drawing room, has spurned to read them. He only got a hint of the filth by chance; and being very wroth at such doings, he resolved to shave and scrub me himself; or in other words, he undertook to teach me how I must write, if I wish to get among the ladies. Accordingly, he took me, grown gentleman as I was; and did give it to me, just as other schoolmasters do; and then he put a book into my hand, and told me to read that. It was a very edifying book; particularly the chapter *Upon the dirt and filth of Mephibosheth Stepsure*. I shall give you a quotation in Censor's own words: "Steppy, my old boy, give heed to what I say; and put an end to this beastliness. There must be no talking to ladies about white stripes upon gable ends: you must speak to them only about violation; as I did in one of my letters: and then they will be able to converse with you, without either lowering their voice, or feeling a flush upon their face." With such uncommon instruction, it was easy for me to see that I was sadly to blame for recording Jack Scorem's misdeeds. I shall tell you how I got into the scrape; and I hope you will prevail upon the ladies to forgive me.

The summer before last, one of Tandem's sons, who is doing business in Halifax, came up to his father's with a number of young ladies upon a party of pleasure. The ladies had never been in the country before: of course, they were wonderfully inquisitive, and wonderfully gratified by young Tandem's information. Now, as soon as they entered our town, they began to see a spout sticking out from one house, and the boards below the windows whitened upon another. This at first passed without observation; but being repeated, it fixed their attention, and produced inquiries which made the young gentleman smile. Female curiosity was now excited; and smiles and silence at last made it intolerable. But happening to stop at Soakem's, which is exactly opposite the end of Jack Scorem's house, the young ladies applied for information to old Stot's son Hodge, who was standing before the door. Now, Hodge, like myself, had neither been at Parnassus, nor drunk the waters of Helicon. He did not, therefore, explain, as Censor would have done, that the vision which flared in beauty's eye, was caused by the

Nocturnal distillations of Jack Scorem,

Who did as all his sires had done before him.

But I suppose he conveyed his meaning in terms equally well understood; for the ladies, in their haste to get away, almost overturned Tandem, who was standing in the door. Considering with myself, therefore, that such paintings were peculiar to our town, I put them into the *Chronicles*; but I must have been mistaken; for Censor assures me that we are a very cleanly sort of folks. . . .

Regular industry directed to the cultivation of earth was well delineated in the characters of Scantosh, of 'Squire Worthy and of Stepsure himself; while less table methods of employment were cried down by the fate ack Scorem, by ridiculing fox-catching, dealing in watches such like trafficking invented by idleness as an excuse for ness. Ample and unqualified praise is justly due to our author for the conception and development of these characters. y were copied so exactly from nature, that in every county he province their prototypes were found; and men everywhere discovered among their neighbours and acquaintances the individuals who were so admirably hit off. The letters were uine copies taken from originals, and the likeness struck by every beholder. But with this I have finished my panegyric; and a more painful but no less essential duty remains to be performed. The merits of these essays were obscured with ral defects which I shall mention; that Stepsure, should he in address the public, may step a little surer on the delicate ground on which he has trodden.

Nothing, I think, should find a place among moral strictures, that is offensive to decency. A lady of the finest feelings would be able to read aloud in any company these letters from beginning to end. There should be no allusions that would call colour to her cheek, or force her to lower and interrupt her voice. A filthy image, however true, a reference to those actions he body over which modesty in all ages has drawn a veil, a on the shingles below a garret window are unworthy of a moralist. They deform, without adding to the truth of his pictures, and always weaken the general effect. He should purify his own imagination from everything unholy and unchaste before he attempts to reform the age. A violation of decency is less donable than a deviation from the unities.

I have more to say in the way of blame. Although our country people are a time and money-spending race, they are far from being dirty in their houses or persons. Exceptions may be made on to the general rule, but on the whole their habits lean to cleanliness and comfort. Much therefore which has been said of Mephibosheth on this head is not a candid portrait of our people, and is wide of the truth as a distinguishing characteristic. A frog has ever found its way into the broth pot, the contents would not be palatable to ninety-nine out of a hundred; neither would the house dog be an acceptable bedfellow.

But the chief fault of our author, as a moral painter, is the sameness of his characters. They have neither colouring nor relief. They appear on the canvas in the same lifeless and uniform group. The language is never varied, nor rendered applicable to their parts. We are not let into the diversities of their opinions or views by appropriate diction; for Parson Drone catches in the very same style in which Stepsure courts his wife, and the vagabonds converse in the jail. Even the several characters themselves are not distinct. After one or two of them are read and studied, you become acquainted with the rest. There is novelty to keep the attention from falling asleep, no discrimination to attest the hand of the master. They are a set of ill prosing fellows brought together with little art, and cast in common mould.

Lastly, the language of the letters is throughout tame and inelegant. Perspicuous it is and sometimes terse, but never successful nor dignified. The fancy of the writer in no case transports him to Parnassus to pluck a single flower which lorns and scents that delightful mountain. It creeps but never soars; and after all its workings are read and surveyed, the most rapid poet could not cull an image fit for the humblest versification. Both the Muses and the Graces would pronounce their scorn on the letters; the first for the insipidity and coldness of the composition, the last for the offences against delicacy with which they are interspersed.

On the whole these letters are praiseworthy in the design, and are calculated to do good by applying a wholesome corrective to our manners: but the execution betrays neither a waste imagination, nor much power of language. As moral portraits they may find a place on the chimney piece of the cottage, it they will ever be refused admittance into the drawing-room of polite life.

In this letter published today, our correspondent Stepsure takes leave of the public for some time, and discontinues that series of essays, which have been read by men with so much interest.--They have painted with such inimitable truth the thoughtless, luxurious and extravagant habits of our population, that we see ourselves in a mirror, reflected back in them. It would be difficult perhaps to explain to strangers, who have regarded Nova Scotia as a colony of minor importance and comparative poverty, the causes which have led to a total subversion of all simplicity of manners. Our newspapers are full of the complaints of all classes, arising from the way of trade--the scarcity of money--and the failure of resources;--and therefore foreigners will be very apt to imagine, that we are sunk in poverty--have scarcely the means of subsistence--and the lower orders even covered with rags. To such errors the letters of Mephibosheth Stepsure are a complete antidote. There is hardly any other community with the same narrow means which we possess, that has carried cookery, dress and show to such immoderate lengths. Our women are all ladies--our men are all gentlemen. Our farmers cannot travel even to church but in their gig in summer, and on foot in winter. Their taste for expense is quite disproportioned to their incomes; and if five pounds is within their reach, in place of being hoarded up as capital, it is expended in some article of luxury.--Saunders Scantocreesh is too rare a character for Nova Scotia. We have a few old stockings filled with doubloons, at the command of the hands of our farmers. As they pay no rents--as they are subject to no taxes--live exempt from tithes and poor rates--what then becomes of the wealth of the country? It is generally wasted and dissipated in extravagant living--in fine clothes--and in a false parade and show of opulence. The correction of these follies must be the first step towards the augmentation of the provincial capital; and the severe satires, which are directed against them in the letters of our correspondent, cannot fail to produce a salutary effect. Ridicule is perhaps the only weapon with which they can be successfully attacked, for you will hear a person rail, with great acrimony, at the extravagance of the times, to a party of friends, who is entertaining at his table with a dinner of three courses. We are therefore continuing in error from the pernicious influence of custom and fashion, contrary to our more sober and better judgment; and it would be well for those in superior rank, whose fortunes are known and unquestioned, to set us some good examples of moderation. The extraordinary wealth, which was suddenly acquired here during the war, has been the cause of all this perversion of our simple and primitive taste, and it is now time for us to return to the right path, which we have so long deserted.

ACADIAN RECORDER, May 11, 1822

Each letter in *The Letters of Mephibosheth Stepsure*, each chapter in *The Clockmaker*, is a selection of incidents from rural or urban Nova Scotian life designed to illustrate a moral or a social vice. The continuity between chapters is not arrived at through an over-riding unity of plot, as in the novel proper, but by a continuation of character and tone from chapter to chapter as in the essays of *The Spectator*.

In sixteen letters, Mephibosheth Stepsure--in his youth a lame orphan--describes his plodding rise to respectability and affluence in the community of Pictou by a combination of hard work, abstinence, religiosity, and cunning. Akin to Mephibosheth in ideology, practice, and prosperity are his wife, Dorothy, and her mother; his son, Abner; his cousin, Harrow; and a hard-featured Scots emigrant, Saunders Scantocreesh. Favoured by God, these devout Presbyterians listen to the spiritual admonitions of Dr. Drone. Against these faithful sheep of the congregation are the goats--all who succumb to the lure of a gambling economy and to the thriftlessness and dissipations of the frontier. In letter after letter, the rake's progress of the local citizens is described and their ultimate hardships are recounted.

There is much to repel the modern reader in *The Letters of Mephibosheth Stepsure*. Christian ethics, one feels, ought to be an end in themselves and not a means of making money, and to a healthy nature cold-blooded gloating over the misfortunes and failures of others is never pleasant. The book also has technical flaws. The characters--Trot, Whinge, Sham, Clippet--are, as their names suggest, caricatures; the episodes are often farce; and the use again and again of the same plot situations is monotonous. To compensate for these defects, *The Letters of Mephibosheth Stepsure* possess a marvellously unified tone and sensibility, a robust realism, a lack of prudishness, and a sustained, almost Swiftian, irony.

..... (A modern negative view -- Fred Cogswell in *The Literary History of Canada* (U.T. Press, 1965), 92-3.