CHAPTER XVII

THE PIERCE TAVERN

Leaving Massachusetts far behind and crossing the State line into New Hampshire, we came upon new interests at every turn, and, resuming our tavern thoughts, it seemed almost impossible in these enlightened days to realize that years ago, maybe in these very towns, there were auctions of human beings—auctions, where criminals and paupers were sold, the former to the highest, the latter to the lowest, bidder. Lashes were also administered to criminals on the bare back. We learned that at Israel Clifford’s tavern in Dunbarton, New Hampshire, one Gould, a sheep thief, was sold at public auction for “damages and costs,” taxed at twelve pounds, twelve shillings, ten pence.

Paupers were sold in the tap room of the inn, and while the landlord served the thirsty guests with beer, they discussed the value of their victim’s services. Although this revolting custom has passed away in New England, it has not entirely gone out of vogue in Pike’s County, Pennsylvania, for we learn that not many years ago signs were posted, “A woman for sale,” and Mrs. Almira Quick, seventy-seven years of age, went to the lowest bidder for keep for a year.

Whipping was a most common punishment, the victim being tied to a post, many of them glorying in their suffering. Sometimes the stocks were used, and

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the culprits sat with feet imprisoned for a certain length of time. The scarlet letter method was occasionally used when nothing else would cure drunkenness. This happened to Robert Cowles, who, condemned in 1634. "for drunkenness, committed at Rocksborough, was disfranchised and ordered to wear about his neck hanging upon his outward garment a D made of redd cloth and sett upon white to continu this for a yeare, and not to have it off any time he come among company."

Slitting of the ears, principally for uttering malicious and scandalous speeches against either the government or church, was occasionally resorted to, but the most severe punishment of all was the cutting off of the ears or hands, and the slitting of the nostrils.

We sighted the New Hampshire hills as we neared our journey's end, one of the most interesting trips we had taken since starting, for all along the way stood many historic houses, particularly at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where the Governor Wentworth house attracted our attention, a charming old Colonial residence where, in the turbulent days of the Revolution, horses were kept saddled in the cellar and subterranean passages were built, leading out to the river, so that the Governor might slip off unnoticed should an attack occur.

Farther on was the old Warner house, the first brick one built in Portsmouth, the bricks brought over from England. This was erected by Captain MacPheadris, and was afterwards the home of Colonel Warner, a charming house filled with Revolutionary relics.

Then, as we entered Hillsborough, New Hampshire,
Lee House, Marblehead, Massachusetts
Pierce Tavern, Hillsboro, New Hampshire
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we discovered a peaceful little community where meadow lands merge into pine-clad hills standing out sharply against the blue of the New Hampshire skies. We were fascinated with the rugged foothills bounded by stone walls and fences. Here we learned that its name was derived from the hills that enclose it.

We found it a bustling little town, the principal street lined on either side with manufacturing plants, stores and up-to-date buildings. The street led on for three miles, until we reached Hillsborough Bridge, that crossed a merry little stream that wound idly in and out among the rushes.

Not far distant from the little stream stood a large square colonial house known today as the Pierce Tavern. Years ago it was built by Governor Benjamin Pierce, one of New Hampshire’s honored Governors. In the early days before railroads came into existence the stagecoach passed by the house, stopping frequently to discharge distinguished guests, for the latch-string was always out, and the guests knew that a warm welcome awaited them.

When Benjamin Pierce, a Revolutionary hero and politician, built this charming old house, it was considered the finest in all the countryside, and it was here that he brought his wife, Annie Kendrick, to whom eight children were born, the seventh of whom, Franklin, was destined to become a President of the United States.

In those days the mansion was surrounded by extensive grounds, defined by a paling fence, and at the rear were laid out beautiful gardens, most unusual at that period. In front, large graceful elms cast their
shade over the old homestead, while behind stood an ample stable where the Governor's equipages were stored.

The garden covered an acre or more. It was laid out into dividing walks, with here and there summer-houses and artificial ponds stocked with trout. Up and down strutted peacocks, spreading their many-eyed tails as they saw themselves reflected in the limpid pools. The garden is now but a memory, yet it was a favorite resort of the family and their guests and doubtless inside the vine-clad summerhouse sat many a politician of great repute.

During his collegiate days Hawthorne was a frequent guest, for he was one of Franklin Pierce's intimate friends. Proof of this we found by discovering their names linked together and carved into the bark of one of the trees.

As we drew up in front of the door, now graced by a modern-day veranda, we saw the old Governor come marching down the steps, mount his saddle horse to ride to the Exeter Court House, or possibly to Hopkinton, where, as a member of the New Hampshire Assembly, he served for many terms. Then the scene changed, and in imagination a stately coach rolled down the highway bound for the Capitol situated at Concord, New Hampshire. As it came in sight, drawn by four prancing horses, the good folks in the surrounding country flocked around, anxious to obtain a glance of the genial Governor.

We entered the house to find ourselves in a large, capacious hall which formerly extended through the center of the building. At the right was the dining
room and at the left the living room where in olden times the family delighted to gather at the hush of eventide. In those days it was consistently furnished, many of the rare old masterpieces passing into the hands of the descendants. In the Stark Mansion, at Dunbarton, New Hampshire, stand today the grandfather’s clock, the sideboard, and the old saddle on which Franklin Pierce rode during the Mexican War, and many pictures of the Pierce family.

Of the original furnishings, the only trace today is the old scenic paper which, bright as the day it was first hung, is shown on the walls of the living room, a charming old wall hanging, depicting landscapes, tournaments and castles. As we entered the room, memories of its halcyon days came to us, and in imagination we heard Revolutionary heroes, visiting the old Governor, refight many a hard battle. Those were the days when political excitement ran high, and we knew that intimately mingling with renowned men was a lad with hazel eyes and curly brown locks, who afterwards as President sat among the dignitaries of the land.

The dining room, now lacking historic pieces, was most fascinating. Everything was done on a grand scale throughout the house, where in the cellar were annually stored twenty casks of wine, fifty barrels of cider and plenty of New England rum.

Across the street stands an old farmhouse which is of equal interest. This was the home of Franklin Pierce during his married life, a simple rambling structure, supplemented by a small shed at one side where during his lifetime the library of President Pierce was stored. Nothing has been disturbed since
the great statesman passed away, for his nephew, who has inherited the house, has carefully preserved the wonderful collection of books, portraits and autographs that were gathered during his uncle’s lifetime. It was inspiring to visit this old farmhouse and see for ourselves the wonderful bits it contained. Among the portraits that lined the wall stood out one of Hawthorne, paid for by the late President and considered by experts to be the best of the author that has ever been executed.

Most interesting of all were the letters, many of them of inestimable value, especially those written by Hawthorne, Jefferson Davis and many of his old friends.

Nothing exceeded in romantic interest the old landscape paper, particularly today, when it has been revived in reproductions, and while the new landscape papers suggest the old ones they certainly have, many of them, been copied with faithful exactness.

The best example dates from twenty-five years immediately prior to the Revolution, leading on to fifty years afterward. One of these papers had interested us during our stay in Marblehead. It was on the Jeremiah Lee house built in 1760, the wall papers having been made to order in England to fit spaces. This fact was proved when a panel that peeled off several years ago was found to bear the inscription, “11 Regent Street, London. Between windows, upper hall.”

Many of these papers were made in blocks instead of long rolls, the shading being often done by hand with the utmost care. Lovely tones of red, blue and brown produced quiet color effects through the use of
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from fifteen to twenty sets of blocks. While many of these blocks are still in existence, since the World War Armistice it has been almost impossible to find workmen who can reproduce the original effects.

There lies a great charm in these old wall papers, for they express distinct ideas, a single theme elaborated upon and often decorating a whole room; — such as the mythological story of Cupid and Psyche, the manufacture of which required the use of fifteen hundred sets of blocks for the making of twelve panels.

One of the most exquisite French papers is the "Adventures of Telemachus," done in shades of soft green, red, peacock blue and white. This was a favorite novelty in Paris about 1820, when examples were sent to this country and are today found in the hall of Andrew Jackson's residence "The Hermitage," near Nashville, Tennessee, as well as in many other houses erected about that date.

Hunting scenes imported from Antwerp were popular in the early days of the past century. They are finished with remarkably brilliant colors, the dark green of the forest throwing into fine relief the red coats of the huntsmen and the yelping hounds. Don Quixote paper is rarely found, being considered one of the three rarest pictorial papers in the country. It is finished in tones of brown upon a cream-white background, and depicts many fascinating scenes that are well worth study.

Scenes from Paris were much in vogue during Washington's and John Adams's administrations. "The Seasons" is a fine landscape paper, pictured in neutral tint with no sharp contrast, and represents the sowing
of seeds, the harvesting of the crops and snow scenes.

One, very little known, is the "Paris Monuments." This comes in eighteen-inch sections, thirty strips in all, and depicts the front of the Invalides’ Hospital, the Abbey St. Germain, the Bourbon Palace, Luxembourg Palace, the Tuileries, the triumphal gate of St. Denis, and the steeple of St. Stephen’s. Another unique wall-hanging shows the Mosque of Omar, Oriental scenes done in color. Possibly one of the most interesting is a French paper in sepia tones that portrays the life history of a French gallant of the eighteenth century. Each of these scenes is surrounded by rococo scrolls, and we find represented a quarrel over dice, an "affair of honor," a proposal of marriage, and an elopement.