

SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE

Townmeeting Day



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WITH

SEVEN DAY BOOK;
NOT TO BE RENEWED.

BY
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TOWN MEETING DAY

By Sidney M. Chase

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR



SHAGGY gray horse, drawing an old farmer in a mud-splashed Democrat wagon, ploughed through the depths of a New England country road. A March chill was in the air, and the dark hemlocks still held ragged patches of snow and ice. Presently he came abreast of a white-painted farm-house. In the barn-yard, busy about his chores, was a grim-visaged man in overalls. The driver steered his horse to the roadside, and pulled on the reins.

"Whoa!" he called.

"Ready fer town meetin', Aaron?"

The man in overalls looked up, slowly straightened his rusty length, and spat scornfully at the wood-pile.

"I dunno 's I be, Hiram," he said.

"Sho! Riled ye some, Joel's beatin' ye fer dog officer last year, I cal'late!"

The other came toward the wagon, and lifting one muddy boot, placed it carefully on the hub of a wheel.

"'Tain't thet, Hiram, but I swan t' man! We can't git nothin' 't this end o' the town. The see-lickmen dumps our taxes onto them bogholes o' roads in the South Parish, with this turnpike fairly spilin' fer a few loads o' gravel. They got a load o' new-fangled books intew the lib'ry, an' when Almiry goes thar, the' ain't none never in. An' now"—he exploded—"the old 'Torrent' ain't good enough fer 'em, an' nothin' tew it but they must buy one o' them sody factories, a chemical enjine, they call it! I don't want no part in sech crazy doin's!"

"Ef you want to vote fer see-lickmen, you better hurry up 'n' git suthin' warm," observed Hiram; "it's consid'able sharp."

The other glanced unseeingly at the wood-pile, and then expectantly down the road.

"Hold on a minute, Hi," he said hurriedly, as he started toward the house; "I guess I'll go along."

Throughout its sparsely settled length, the little township was alive with interest. The day of the year had come. Over the

freezing country roads ancient vehicles, filled with shrewd-faced farmers, creaked joyfully toward the "Centre." As the several roads converged upon the town-house, the caravan grew, and old friends—and enemies—nodded mutual recognition.

"Thar's Nate Ellis," said one sandy-bearded driver. "Hear he figgers to git tree warden ag'in. Says he's got his stickers all printed complete fer thutty-five cents, an' won't buy nobody nothin'."

"'F he don't do no better 'n what he done last year, thet 's all he's wuth," remarked another.

"Hello, here's Uncle Joab a-comin'. Hear 'bout his catchin' the old stray hoss 'n' drivin' him int' the pound? Hoss died, an' Joab couldn't find nobody 't owned him, so he hed to pay fer buryin' of him himself! Cost him a dollar 'n' a quarter, 'n' nigh broke his heart!"

The mud-spattered cavalcade jolted past the "Common" and the white meeting-house, and bore down upon the bleak structure that served as "opera-house" and town-hall. The solemn horses were moored along the fences and in the sheds back of the meeting-house; and down the rows of ancient top-buggies and Democrat wagons their owners gathered in little groups, renewing friendships and shrewdly "figgerin'" chances for a "'propriation" on their pet highway.

"Hear you been dreenin' your swamp medder lot——"

"Wa-al, yes, I never cut more 'n five ton o' hay——"

"Ef you turn under the stubble 'n' sow a green crop of oats, 'n' then plant yer pertaters——"

"I done thet last year, 'n' this year I cal'late to raise a marster crop o' corn——"

"Thet Bear Hill road is the all-firedest wust piece I ever see. Ef the see-lickmen won't do nothin'——"

"Oughter git Aaron t' stan' up in town meetin' 'n' oppose ye—town 'll vote anything ef Aaron 's only ag'in it! Haw, haw!"

"Down t' the Corners t'other day I swapped that spavined roan mare fer——"

Meanwhile the tide was setting toward the doorway, and presently a stream of rough-coated, barn-scented farmers was surging into the hall. Inside it seemed almost colder than out-doors, though two immense stoves were doing their best to cheer the bleak interior. Around these roaring furnaces buckskin gloves were stripped off, and stiffened fingers thrust toward the heat; and while the thawing-out progressed, knots of bearded politicians nodded, chuckling, over some clever bit of "log-rolling."

As the room filled, the political temperature rose; little groups of voters drew apart with lowered voices; shrewd plots matured; and the thronged, smoke-laden room grew tense with expectation.

On the stage, seated at tables, were several men, one with a big book of records. Presently he rose, and through the buzz of talk came three sharp raps upon the table. A hush fell, and the vacant places on settees were quickly filled, though in the rear many still stood. Talk ceased, and attentive faces turned toward the town clerk, a meager little man, who proceeded to read the warrant.

As the monotonous list of articles to be acted upon—which every one knew by heart—droned on to the end, the clerk announced:

"Article One. To choose a moder-ay-tor to preside at said meeting."

Then he added solemnly:

"Prepar' and for'ard your ballots fer moder-ay-tor!"

A great shuffling of feet began as a line of farmers, each with a mysterious slip of paper, worked its way toward the stage, where each importantly deposited his slip in what appeared to be an old contribution-box borrowed from the meeting-house. As each voted, his name was called by the clerk, and checked by the selectmen. When the last man had passed, the contribution-box was overturned upon the table before the selectmen, who counted the slips of paper.

Presently the clerk announced pompously:

"Whole number of votes for moder-ay-tor, eighty-six; nec'sary fer choice forty-

four; Ichabod N. Peaslee hes eighty-six, 'n' I declar' him u-nanimously elected!"

Out in the audience a stocky, red-bearded man arose, and, removing his hat, made his way to the platform.

He took his place amid a tumult of noise, and dealt the table a resounding bang. Then he swept the room with a leisurely eye.

"'Cordin' t' good ol' custom, 't might be safer to open this meetin' with prayer," he said dryly.

It was accordingly voted.

"Ef there's any preacher present——" suggested the moderator.

There was an embarrassing pause.

"Ain't any brother willin' t' lead the meetin' in prayer?"

No response. A longer pause.

"Mister Mod'raytor," came a voice, "I motion 't we reconsider!" and while a slight titter ran around the room, the motion was solemnly put and carried.

The moderator scrutinized the warrant, frowningly, through his spectacles.

"Ef there's no objection we'll take up Article Two," he said.

His ponderous forefinger came to a stop at the proper paragraph.

"Thet article reads 'to choose all nec'sary 'n' usual town officers fer the ensuin' year.' Prepar' 'n' for'ard your ballots fer fust see-lickman. I declar' the polls open!" Bang!

Stolid, whiskered men; keen, wiry men; awkward youths in unaccustomed "store clothes"; silent and serious, laughing and "blaggarding"—the line plodded past the contribution-box, each man holding a slip of paper (hurriedly distributed by friends of the candidates) with a grip that showed the value attached to his right to vote.

"Hev all voted that wish? Then I declar' the polls closed!" Whack!

Tellers counted the votes, and the moderator announced to an intent audience that the "fust see-lickman" had been re-elected.

All forenoon a steady line of voters crept past the contribution-box. There were some lively contests as the extraordinary list of officers was chosen—from "see-lickmen" down through constables, fence-viewers, field drivers, surveyors of lumber, measurers of wood and bark, to pound-keeper and dog officer.

Elsewhere in the smoke-laden room a great rumble of conversation arose from changing groups of voters, who filled the pauses by gathering at a table in one corner to consume cakes and candy, and deadly colored "soft drinks."

Meanwhile the women of the town were busy in the meeting-house. Finally the moderator extracted a great silver watch, peered anxiously at it through his steel-rimmed spectacles, and shut it with a snap.

"The chair awaits a motion to a'journ fer dinner," he declared briskly. "I hear t' the ladies is 'bout ready fer us over t' the vestry."

"I move we a'journ tell quarter past one!" yelled a voter, and the meeting dissolved through the doorway like a spring freshet when the ice goes out.

Across the Common the stream swept, and bore down upon long tables loaded with boiled ham, baked beans, apple, mince, and many-storied Washington pies, and steaming pitchers of coffee. Somewhat later, contentedly puffing "general store" cigars, furnished by the successful candidates of the morning, the procession straggled forth to gossip in the horse-sheds or the entrance to the town-house, in the placid comfort that only a good dinner and a cigar can give.

Finally pipes were emptied, cigar butts flung away, and the throng poured into the hall, full of zest for the struggles of the afternoon. Galleries filled with lively school-girls and their serious-faced mothers, equally keen for the combat below.

At one-fifteen, the moderator smote the table.

"What is the pleasure of the meetin'?"

"Move we take up Article Five!"

"Sekind the motion."

"Those-in-favor-say-'Aye'—opposed—'No'—it's-a-vote-'n'-I-so-declar'-it!"

There was a rustle of pages as every man turned to the town reports in his printed pamphlet.

A violent little man precipitated himself into the aisle, and waved an accusing finger at the first report. Faces swung toward him, and a snicker of anticipation ran around the room.

"I'd like to en-quire, Mr. Moder-ay-tor," he stormed, "ef this town is a-collectin'

tramps! This book says we've took care o' nine hunderd 'n' forty-three the past year, 'n' I figger thet ain't nigh all! The overseer o' the poor 's fed 'em on salt fish 'n' a mess o' baked beans Saturd'y nights, an' charges the town twenty-three cents fer each on 'em! Why, Mr. Moder-ay-tor, 't thet profit, he kin buy a pianner fer his durned tramp hotel!"

Applause swept the room, while the moderator pounded for order.

Into the confusion a tall Yankee in a back seat arose.

"Mister Mod-er-ay-tor!" he drawled. "I want tew show them tramps dew hospitality! When he ain't to hum, the overseer 'lows tramps tew git grub t' the gin'ral store. Now, I motion 't the town build hoss sheds behind the tramp house. Bum-by some tramp might come along with a hoss 'n' wagin!"

A roar of laughter, pierced with cries of "Question!" followed. When the turmoil lessened, the report was accepted.

After this flurry all went well until one of the selectmen unguardedly rose to advocate that the town constables patrol beats. He understood "they done it over t' Walnut Junction, 'n' he thought 't would be a good idee."

A chill silence greeted his efforts, until Hiram, deliberately, without a smile, rose to voice the sentiments of the majority.

"Mister Mod'raytor," he began, "I motion we 'propriate a hunderd dollars to buy two hosses. Ef the see-lickmen cal'lates t' have Obed Runnells 'n' Job Parsons patrol the hull length of this town, anybody thet's 's tarnal slow 's they be has sartinly got to be mounted!"

He subsided amid laughter. So did the dignified selectman. The subject dropped.

From the reports, the meeting turned to the appropriations for the coming year. After voting a general sum for the highways, the fun began.

The aggrieved Aaron opened the ball. "Mister Moder-ay-tor," he began, "I'd like to ask fer a hunderd dollars to fix up the Swamp Holler road, just below our school-house. It's the wust piece o' road in the hull county. It's full o' rocks, 'n' mud up t' the axles, 'n' t'other day I see two hogs mired in the mud tryin' t' git across 't!"



Drawn by Sidney M. Chase.

Old friends—and enemies—nodded mutual recognition.—Page 354.



Lifting one muddy boot, placed it carefully on the hub of a wheel. " 'Tain't thet, Hiram."—Page 554.

The moderator recognized Mr. Higgins, and the fiery critic of tramps jumped into the fray.

"I'm ag'in any special 'propriation fer thet boghole!" he bellowed. "Thet slough hes cost the voters o' this town four dollars 'n' nine cents a foot—I measured it out, myself. Thet's where our taxes goes! The sup'rintendent o' thet deastric' don't know nothin' 'bout road-buildin'. He don't do nothin' but dump on rocks 'n' then rake 'em off ag'in. He——"

"Mr. Mod'raytor!" interrupted a big red-faced voter, the highway superintendent. "I rise to a p'int of order! The gentleman couldn't tell a good road, ef he see one, frum a cor-ju-roiy road through hell——"

Bang! "Gentleman's out of order!" shouted the moderator.

"I'm in good enough order to lick——" and cheering drowned the rest. The battle was on. A fat little man, with a propitiatory air, secured the floor.

"Mr. Mod'raytor," he declared, "thet road is allers bad, but it's gen'ally wuss.

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We all use the roads, 'n' our time is val'able. I ain't like some thet 'll vote a thing down 'cause somebody's goin' t' make a dollar out of it. Every one 't lives on thet road is good taxpayers, 'n' they all go to meetin' reg'lar but one, 'n' he told me *he* would ef the town 'd fix up the road!" (There was a breeze of laughter.) "I guess, Mister Chairman, thet we kin build roads 's good 's Eye-talians from Italy!"

"I move a amendment," yelled Mr. Higgins, "thet we raise fifty dollars, 'stead of a hunderd!"

"Vote it down!" shouted Aaron's friends.

The amendment was lost by a volley of "Noes!"

"Wa'al, Gentlemen," the moderator observed, with a cynical grin, "you've voted *not* to raise fifty dollars. Only thing you kin do now, 's I see, is to vote forty-nine dollars 'n' ninety-nine cents!"

It was a pretty trick. On Aaron's side jaws dropped and amazed voters stared at each other. It was true. Could noth-



The room filled: little groups of voters drew apart: shrewd plots matured.—Page 555.

ing be done? A babel of argument and wrath broke forth, in the midst of which somebody moved it be "indefinitely postponed," and the crowd carried it with a whoop.

Amid a shout of laughter, Aaron sat down. There were no more special appropriations for highways. The other appropriations went through with desultory fighting. Somebody wanted an itemized account of expenses under "Miscellaneous," and the selectmen said next

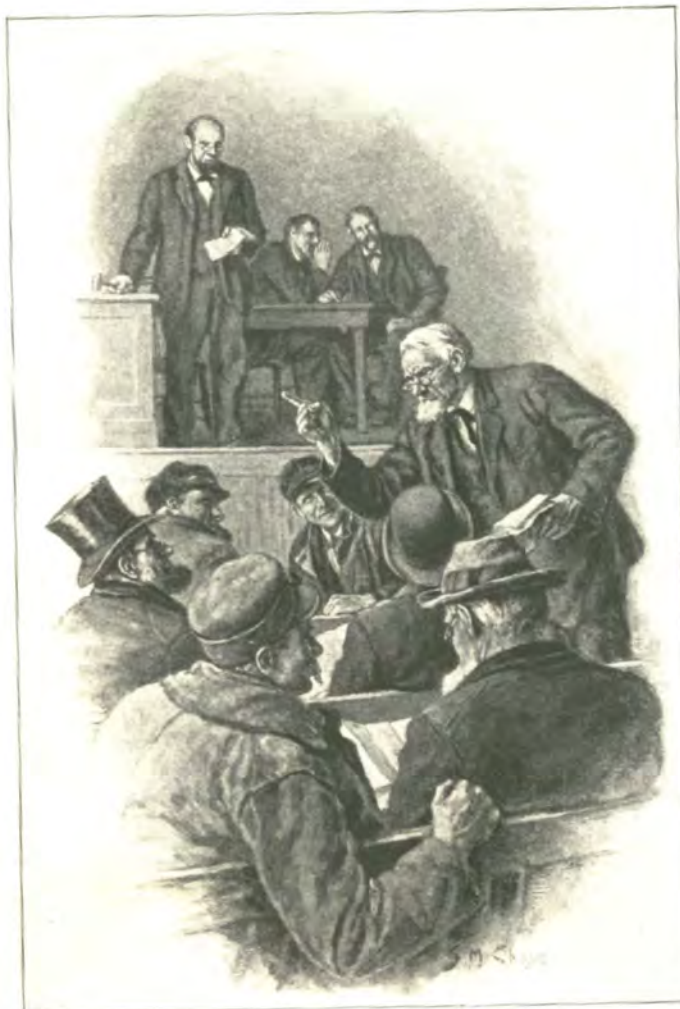
year they would bring it "in a wheelbarrow."

The moderator read the next Article:

"To see if the town will vote to appropriate the dog tax to the public library."

Somebody moved that it be appropriated same as last year.

"There might be some objection to putting that motion," the chairman said dryly. "It ain't generally known, but the dog officer last year stole the tax, 'n' then went on a drunk 'n' blowed it all in!"



"I'd like to enquire, Mr. Moder-ay-tor," he stormed, "ef this town is a-collectin' tramps!"—Page 556.

Good thing, tew. I hate dawgs wuss 'n pizen—wouldn't be bit by one fer twenty-five dollars, 'n'—"

"Deacon, I cal'late you're out of order!" reproved the moderator.

"Wa'al, I motion the dawg officer enforce the law!" the deacon sputtered.

"Might 's well vote fer the assessors to assess the taxes!" yelled some one.

"Might vote wuss'n thet!" came an answer, amid great laughter and stamping.

Then the motion was solemnly put and carried.

The moderator drew a large red handkerchief from his pocket, wiped the perspiration from his shiny head, and drew

a long breath. Then he read the next Article:

"To see ef the town will vote to abolish deestrick schools and build a large school near the centre of the town."

It was an old and bitterly fought question. A young farmer led off for centralization. He showed the advantages in economy of effort, better teachers, and reduced expenses. He ridiculed the quarrels under the district school system, and ended by saying that "if he believed in a personal devil as his fathers did he would say that *he* created district schools."

The older men had been growing angry under the scathing attack, and now an old Andrew Jackson Democrat, with a white beard and an eagle eye, rose to reply.

"Mister Moder-ay-tor, sir," he said. "Ef our fathers b'leev'd in a personal devil, some o' their sons has been

actin' up tew it ever sence!" (A titter ran around the room.) "I've heered my young friend's remarks with pleasure. They sounded kind o' nat'ral, 'cause he's been a-sayin' of 'em over ev'ry year. We ain't needed tew use 'em, so he's hed a good chance tew practise. Aour grand-fathers done some putty good things, 'n' I cal'late they're good enough fer me!" (Applause.) "He says us old fellers is 'triggin' the wheels o' progress,' 'n' thet aour deestrick schools 'ain't fit tew keep cattle in.' Scriptur' says suthin' about 'the prudent man foreseeeth the evil 'n' hideth himself,' so I say let's fix 'em up right, 'n' not throw 'em away, complete!

The schools is better 'n' they wuz twenty years ago, 'n' we kin run 'em better 'n any durn committee. Le's keep the power whar' it b'longs—in the hands o' the people! He talks 'bout quarrels: wa'al, some has family quarrels—does he want tew abolish families?" (A voice: "Yes, if there's anything better!") "Wa'al, I don't cal'late tew throw *my* wife int' the street, if I *kin* git a better one! No, Mister Moder-ay-tor, I don't b'leve none in abolishin' families, *nor* dees-trick schools, nor any old institution thet's proved a blessin'. I hope the town 'll vote tew keep the schools where aour grandfathers 'n' aour gre't-grandfathers got their larnin', 'n' if we dew, I'd say, same 's Simeon done: 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, accordin' tew thy word!'" and the old fellow sank into his seat.

A storm of applause and stamping followed, while the moderator pounded in vain for order. The younger man's clever argument was hopelessly shattered against the popular appeal of the old man. While the latter sat, breathing fast and wiping the perspiration from his forehead, the vote was taken, and a tumult of "Noes!" proclaimed his victory. With a smile the old fellow relaxed into his seat. He had spoken for his generation. The needful changes must come with his sons and grandsons.

Many of the Articles ran off smoothly, and the business was drawing to a close.

The afternoon was spent, and the pale March sunlight fell in level rays through



He seized a chair and poised it above the tumult. "Set down!" he thundered.—Page 55a.

the high western windows. In an exaggerated stillness the tired moderator read Article Twenty-two:

"To see ef the town will vote to sell the old hand fire-enjine 'Torrent' and purchase a new chemical enjine."

Both sides drew a long breath before the battle.

"Mister Moderator!"

It was the bugle call to charge. An alert young farmer was on his feet.

"This town hes been a back-number long enough! I heerd Mose Runnells down t' the store t'other night boastin' we didn't hev no town debt, 'n' Gosh knows we ain't got nothin' else, neither! They

ain't no one 'n this town old enough t' rec'lect when the old 'Torrent' got to a fire 'n time t' do any good! Thet lively turtle of ourn ain't no better 'n a funeral procession. Last fire we hed, she 'most got thar', but thet didn't help none, 'cause them sturdy veterans hed hed a blow-out night before 'n' they was so plumb winded haulin' the engine, they couldn't pump a stream strong enough to bust the winders, 'n' somebody hed to do it with an axe!"

The crowd shouted with glee, and Aaron took up the challenge.

"I dunno whar' this extravagance is a-goin' to stop!" he began solemnly. "Thet sody-manufactory 'd cost more 'n five hunderd dollars, 'n' we got t' buy hosses a-top o' thet! Thet's a-goin' to increase my taxes more 'n sixty cents, 'n' I ain't hed sixty cents 'n my pocket fer two weeks!"

"Hide yer pants 'n the woodshed, 'n' yer wife won't find 'em!" yelled a voice.

Scowling at the interruption, he continued:

"I say, Mister Moder-ay-tor, it's better t' burn an old outlyin' barn some'ars once 'n a dog's age, 'n' 'tis to run the town int' the poorhouse! Es fer outlyin' deestricks, I never see a cornfield yit 't didn't hev outside rows!"

The old man finished, and sat down, belligerently.

A young voter dashed into the breach.

"I s'pose there's some in this town, Mr. Chairman," he said, "thet would oppose takin' a gold dollar, ef you offered it to 'em fer seventy-five cents! I'd like t' know what the gentleman has got ag'in the farmers o' this town, 't he wants their buildin's to burn down! I cal'late the gentleman must be one o' the survivors o' them engine-house suppers. Thet's a turrible dangerous life. I knowed a fireman once in awful danger—he almost got wet!"

"Outside or inside?" yelled a sympathizer.

"Outside, o' course—he was wet through inside long ago! Them firemen 'd git full goin' under a sour apple tree. But thet ain't the wust. My shed ketched afire one day, 'n' I hollered t' one o' the fire department 't was pickin' pears 'n the next lot t' come over an' help put 'er out, 'n' all he

done was t' yell back, 'The damn thing ain't wuth it!'"

"The gentleman is a liar!" shouted a red-faced fireman.

The audience rose to its feet and yelled! In the riot that followed, the moderator was equal to the occasion. He dropped his useless gavel, seized a chair, and poised it above the tumult.

"Set down!" he thundered at the crowd. "The last man standin' up gits this!"

Everybody dropped into seats.

When quiet was partly restored, Hiram gained the floor.

"The' ain't been no great o' fires 'n this town, 's I kin rec'lect," he said. "I own a consid'able property, an' I dunno 's I'd feel any safer with a chemical engine than I do now."

"Nothin' like good insurance!" put in a voice.

Hiram grinned.

"The old 'Torrent' ain't been out fer nigh onto six months," he went on, "an' last fire we hed, Eben Davis's barn burnt clean t' the ground, 'count o' there bein' a settin' hen on the engine, 'n' nobody didn't want to disturb her!"

"The old tub might jest 's well stay t' home, anyway," shouted the first speaker. "Up to Andy Payson's they got the hose in the well, 'side o' the house, 'n' the wind shifted, 'n' they come mighty nigh losin' the gel-durned engine! Don't need no insurance on buildin's—place to put thet is on the engine!"

"*Did* lose the one over t' Green Valley!" interrupted a shrill voice. "Engine-house ketched afire one night, 'n' burned the ol' hand-tub up complete!"

"Question! question!" yelled the crowd.

"All in favor o' sellin' the old engine 'n' buyin' a chemical—" began the moderator.

"Everybody up!" shouted the younger men.

"—say 'Aye!'" he finished.

A mighty thunder of "Ayes" shook the roof.

"Opposed 'No!'"

There was a feeble chorus of "Noes," and the struggle of the day was over.

The weary audience began to straggle out, pausing to nod or exchange a word with a friend—or late enemy. The ap-

parent bitterness melted away before the gibes of the moderator, as he auctioned off to the *lowest* bidder the doubtful privilege of collecting the taxes. Then he paused and surveyed the meeting.

"Is there any other bus'ness to come before this meetin'?" he inquired. "Then a motion to a'journ 's in order. It's gittin' late, 'n' chores hes got to be done."

"I motion we a'journ!" shouted the crowd, and the meeting dissolved.

Outside, the long shadow of the meeting-house spire fell across the little Common. The chill of twilight penetrated heavy overcoats. Aaron turned up his collar and arranged the muffler about his neck, while

Hiram unhitched the patient horse and climbed stiffly into the wagon. Aaron mounted beside him, and pulled up the heavy buffalo robe.

No word was spoken as they jolted off over the frozen ruts, past the black patch of hemlocks, and turned into the road for home.

Presently Hiram flicked his shaggy horse smartly with the whip, and chuckled to himself.

"Git ap along!" he said.

"Wa'al," said Aaron, answering the other's unspoken thought, "I dunno. They don't hev no sech town meetin's nowdays 's they ust to hev, Hiram, when you 'n' me wuz boys!"



"Wa'al, . . . they don't hev no sech town meetin's nowdays."



... Contentedly puffing "general store" cigars, straggled forth to gossip in the horse-sheds.—Page 556.

Amid cheers and stamping the motion was withdrawn, and a proper one offered.

Smarting under his previous defeat, Aaron arose.

"Ef thet lib'ry don't do others no more good 'n it doos me," he observed, "it ain't wuth a tax on kittens, let alone dogs. I ain't took a book out to read in ten years, 'n' when I do, one I want ain't never in! Jonas Doolittle wuz tellin' me he arst fer a book one day, 'n' the librarian said 't warn't in. 'Set here fer me 'n' keep

shop a spell,' s's she to Jonas, 'while I go over t' the store 'n' git me a dress pattern.' Jonas done so, 'n' while he wuz waitin' he looks 'round, 'n' durned ef he didn't find thet same identical book on a shelf!"

"Mister Mod'raytor," rasped a sober, thin-lipped individual, in a shiny black frock-coat. "What's this I hear 'bout the dawg officer chargin' the town four dollars tew collect the tax? Ef he can't git the money, law pervides he kin kill the dawg.

Town Meeting Time

The picture by the artist Sidney M. Chase is said to be of a West Newbury town meeting in the very early 1900s.

In the foreground a man stands as he exercises his privilege to address the assembly on a subject he obviously feels strongly about. He has the attention of the men seated about him, one who has turned to face him with an amused expression. On the stage in the background stands a man beside a table, presumably a selectman or possibly the moderator.

Called Town Meeting Time, the picture characterizes the democratic process that continues in West Newbury today of townspeople meeting to decide the course of town affairs for the next year.

Although times change, topics for town meeting action, and lively discussion, remain similar, the roads, the schools, the library. Perhaps the most important decision made in Town Hall that would affect the town for years to come was the vote in 1884 to purchase a steam fire engine.

In February that year, the Ruddock Shoe Company burned. The town had no fire fighting equipment other than buckets, so by the time the handtub came over from Rocks Village and help came down from Haverhill, the building was a total loss. This provided the impetus for the beginning of a town fire department with the vote at the annual town meeting to purchase a steam engine.

Another momentous decision made in Town Hall was to build Central School in 1910. Until that time there were nine district schools. With the constant expense for keeping the buildings in repair, the decision

was finally made to build Central School (now the Town Office Building) and bring all the students together at one location. This did consolidate all except the No. 9 school on Turkey Hill Road which remained open until the 1930s.

In more recent times, the purchase of the former Cardinal Cushing Academy property in 1972 had the unanimous backing of the more than 300 voters who attended the special town meeting on March 18. The trustees of the academy were in the process of marketing it when a West Newbury resident heard it was for sale and the action began for the town to acquire the property.

The million dollar bond issue for the purchase of the 343 acre property was the largest in the history of the town at that time. Of that amount, \$750,000 was the purchase price, the remaining \$250,000 for expenses and renovations.

The characteristics of Chase's picture remain the same today as in earlier times, free discussion with its give and take, but the one difference in today's meetings is the presence of women who play an important part in town affairs.

A noted artist in oils and water color in his later life, Chase began his career as an illustrator and author for magazines and commercial periodicals. His Town Meeting picture appeared with an article he wrote in a 1910 issue of Scribner's magazine.

A native of Haverhill, he graduated from high school there and Harvard College, then attended Pape's Art School in Boston for two years. After several years as illustrator and writer, he studied with Howard

Pyle in Wilmington, Delaware, and for brief periods with Woodbury and Tarbell. He was a great admirer of Winslow Homer.

From about 1916 he devoted his talents to painting and water colors with much of his work being scenes along the Maine coast. He is said to have introduced N. C. Wyeth to Maine.

Chase maintained a studio in Haverhill, but spent part of the summer in Maine near Penobscot Bay.

His work was exhibited throughout Massachusetts and at the National Academy Galleries in New York. In 1938 he was listed in Who's Who in American Art. In 1916 he was elected to life membership as a trustee of the Haverhill Public Library, a position he held until his death in 1957.

Now an art auction is planned for Nov. 18 to earn money for refurbishing the Town Hall ceiling which has paint hanging from it in shreds. Ross Galleries of New York provides an array of art work and the professional auctioneer. Work of local artists Beverly Mitchell, Bruce Taylor, R. Scott Jackson and Elizabeth Szymanski will be included in the auction.

The preview of the art work will be from 7 to 8 p.m. in Town Hall. The auction starts at 8 p.m. The number of persons in attendance from 8 to 9:30 p.m. determines the percentage of art sales for the refurbishing fund. Tickets are \$10 an individual, \$15 per couple, available at the library and from Marjorie Peterson at the Town Office Building.

The West Newbury Historical Society is sponsoring the auction. Anyone who would like to help should call Denise Dennis at 363-8826, Auction Committee chairman.