

# The STORY of WAITSTILL BAXTER



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Kate Douglas Wiggin

BY  
**KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN**

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## PROLOGUE.

Strength and interest of quiet lives in the New England of three-quarters of a century ago provide the framework of "The Story of Waitstill Baxter." That is the skeleton. The flesh and blood of human beings, living and loving and moving in a world of their own that is a miniature picture of the greater world outside, are also there. The story is a cross section of life as seen and described by a woman who has been well called "America's greatest living woman novelist." Amid the hills of New England are many men and women like Waitstill and Patience Baxter and their father, Ivory Boynton and his afflicted mother and funny Cephas Cole, who woos hopefully, but with small chance of success. They find their way into books but seldom, for it takes a master hand to describe faithfully the doings of real people. And that is the reason why "The Story of Waitstill Baxter" has won highest praise from critics who know a good book when they see one.

## CHAPTER I. The Sisters.

**F**AR, far up in the bosom of New Hampshire's granite hills the Saco has its birth. As the mountain rill gathers strength it takes Through Bartlett's vales its tuneful way. Or hides in Conway's fragrant brakes Retreating from the glare of day. Now it leaves the mountains and flows through "green Fryeburg's woods and farms." In the course of its frequent turns and twists and bends it meets with many another stream and sends it, fuller and stronger, along its rejoicing way. When it has journeyed more than 100 miles and is nearing the ocean it greets the Great Ossipee river and accepts its crystal tribute. Then in its turn the Little Ossipee joins forces and the river, now a splendid stream, flows onward to Bonny Eagle, to Moderation and to Salmon falls, where it dashes over the dam like a young Niagara and hurries in a foamy torrent through the ragged defile cut between lofty banks of solid rock.

Widening out placidly for a moment's rest in the sunny reaches near Pleasant point it gathers itself for a new plunge at Union falls, after which it speedily merges itself in the bay and its fresh water no more.

At one of the falls on the Saco the two little hamlets of Edgewood and Riverboro nestle together at the bridge and make one village. The stream is a wonder of beauty just here, a mirror of placid loveliness above the dam, a tawny, roaring wonder at the fall and a mad, white decked torrent as it dashes on its way to the ocean.

The river has seen strange sights in its time, though the history of these two tiny villages is quite unknown to the great world outside. They have been born, waxed strong and fallen almost to decay while Saco water has tumbled over the rocks and spent itself in its impetuous journey to the sea.

It remembers the yellow moccasined Sokokis as they issued from the Indian Cellar and carried their birchen canoes along the wooded shore. It was in those years that the silver skinned salmon leaped in its crystal depths, the otter and the beaver crept with sleek wet skins upon its shore and the brown deer came down to quench his thirst at its brink, while at twilight the stealthy forms of bear and panther and wolf were mirrored in its glassy surface.

Time sped. Men chained the river's turbulent forces and ordered it to grind at the mill. Then houses and barns appeared along its banks, bridges were built, orchards planted, forests changed into farms, white painted meeting houses gleamed through the trees, and distant bells rang from their steeples on quiet Sunday mornings.

All at once myriads of great hewn logs vexed its downward course, slender logs linked together in long rafts and huge logs drifting down singly or in pairs. Men appeared, running hither and thither like ants and going through mysterious operations the reason for which the river could never guess. But the mill wheels turned,

the great saws buzzed, the smoke from tavern chimneys rose in the air, and the rattle and clatter of stagecoaches resounded along the road.

Now children paddled with bare feet in the river's sandy coves and shallows, and lovers sat on its alder shaded banks and exchanged their vows just where the shuffling bear was wont to come down and drink.

The Saco could remember the "cold year," when there was a black frost every month of the twelve, and, though almost all the corn along its shores shriveled on the stalk, there were two farus where the vapor from the river saved the crops, and all the seed for the next season came from the favored spot, to be known as "Egypt" from that day henceforward.

Strange, complex things now began to happen, and the river played its own part in some of these, for there were disastrous freshets, the sudden breaking up of great jams of logs and the drowning of men who were engulfed in the dark whirlpool below the rapids. Caravans, with menageries of wild beasts, crossed the bridge now every year. An infuriated elephant lifted the side of the old Edgewood tavern barn, and the wild laughter of the roistering rum drinkers who were tantalizing the animals floated down to the river's edge. The roar of a lion, tawling and chewing the arm of one of the bystanders, and the cheers of the throng when a plucky captain of the local militia thrust a stake down the beast's throat—these sounds displaced the former warwhoop of the Indians and the ring of the ax in the virgin forests along the shores.

There were days and moonlight nights, too, when strange sights and sounds of quite another nature could have been noted by the river as it flowed under the bridge that united the two little villages.

Issuing from the door of the Riverboro townhouse and winding down the hill through the long row of teams and carriages that lined the roadside, came a procession of singing men and singing women. Convinced of sin, but entranced with promised pardon, spiritually intoxicated by the glowing eloquence of the latter day prophet they were worshipping, the band of "Cochranites" marched down the dusty road and across the bridge, dancing, swaying, waving handkerchiefs and shouting hosannas.

God watched and listened, knowing that there would be other prophets, true and false, in the days to come, and other processions following them. And the river watched and listened, too, as it hurried on toward the sea with its story of the present that was some time to be the history of the past.

When Jacob Cochrane was leading his overwrought, ecstatic band across the river, Waitstill Baxter, then a child was watching the strange, noisy company from the window of a little brick dwelling on the top of the Town House hill.

Her stepmother stood beside her with a young baby in her arms, but when she saw what held the gaze of the child she drew her away, saying, "We mustn't look, Waitstill; your father don't like it."

"Who was the big man at the head, mother?"

"His name is Jacob Cochrane, but you mustn't think or talk about him. He is very wicked."

"He doesn't look any wickeder than the others," said the child. "Who was the man that fell down in the road, mother, and the woman that knelt and prayed over him? Why did he fall, and why did she pray, mother?"

"That was Master Aaron Boynton, the schoolmaster, and his wife. He only made believe to fall down, as the Cochranites do; the way they carry on is a disgrace to the village, and that's the reason your father won't let us look at them."

"I played with a nice boy over to Boynton's," mused the child.

"That was Ivory, their only child. He is a good little fellow, but his mother and father will spoil him with their crazy ways."

"I hope nothing will happen to him, for I love him," said the child gravely. "He showed me a humming bird's nest, the first I ever saw, and the littlest!"

"Don't talk about loving him," chided the woman. "If your father should hear you he'd send you to bed without your porridge."

"Father couldn't hear me, for I never speak when he's at home," said grave little Waitstill. "And I'm used to going to bed without my porridge."

The river was still running under the

bridge, but the current of time had swept Jacob Cochrane out of sight, though not out of mind, for he had left here and there a disciple to preach his strange and uncertain doctrine. Waitstill, the child who never spoke in her father's presence, was a young woman now, the mistress of the house; the stepmother was dead and the baby a girl of seventeen.

The brick cottage on the hilltop had grown only a little shabbier. Deacon Foxwell Baxter still slammed its door behind him every morning at 7 o'clock and, without any such cheerful conventions as goodbyes to his girls, walked

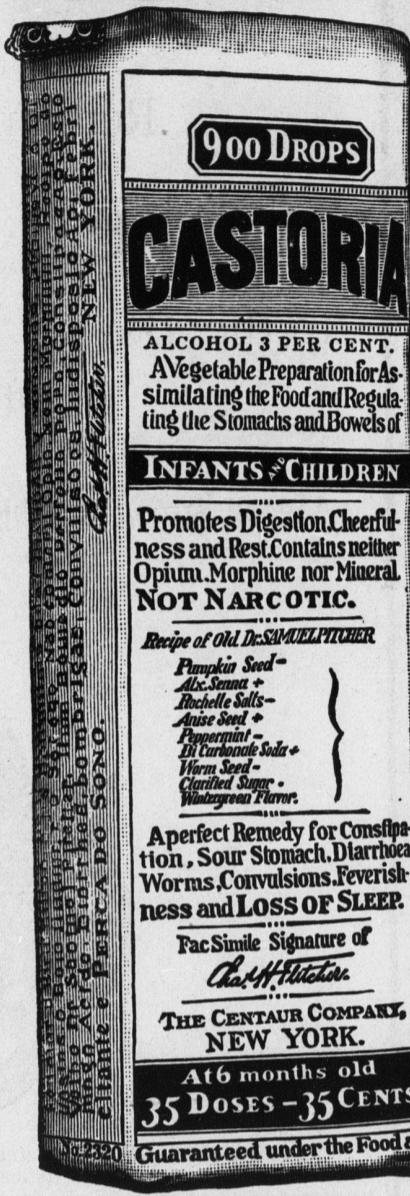
(Continued on page 7, Col. 1)

The growing child has to be doubly nourished—once for the ordinary needs of the body and once for growth. A great many times there is not enough nourishing food taken to provide for the needs of growth; the body is poor, the blood thin, and every condition is suitable for the lodgment of disease in the enfeebled system. Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery is a food medicine. It furnishes the body through the blood with all the elements needed to make sound flesh and sturdy muscle. Don't let your child be handicapped in the race of life. Give it "Golden Medical Discovery" and that will give it strength.

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