

KEZIAH COFFIN

By Joseph C. Lincoln

Author of
Cy Whittaker's Place
Capt. Eri, Etc.

Illustrations by
Ellsworth Young

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SYNOPSIS.

Mrs. Keziah Coffin, supposed widow, is arranging to move from Trumet to Boston, following the death of her brother, for whom she had kept house. Ryan Pepper, widower, offers marriage, and is indignantly refused. Capt. Elkanah Daniels, leader of the Regular church offers Keziah a place as housekeeper for the new minister, and she decides to remain in Trumet. Keziah takes charge of Rev. John Ellery, the new minister, and gives him advice as to his conduct toward members of the parish. Ellery causes a sensation by attending a "Come-outer" meeting. Ellery's presence is bitterly resented by Eben Hammond, leader of the meeting. Grace apologizes for her guardian and Ellery escorts her home in the rain.

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

Ellery stood still in the rain and watched her. He saw her pass the lighted windows and open a door. Into the yellow radiance she flashed and disappeared. A minute more and the bulky form of Eben Hammond, lantern in hand, a sou'wester on his head and his shoulders working themselves into an oilskin coat, burst out of the door and hurriedly limped down toward the shore. On the threshold, framed in light, stood his ward, gazing after him. And the minister gazed at her.

From the bay came the sound of oars in rowlocks. A boat was approaching the wharf. And suddenly from the boat came a hail.

"Halloo! Ahoy, dad! Is that you?" There was an answering shout from the wharf; a shout of joy. Then a rattle of oars and a clamor of talk. And Grace still stood in the doorway, waiting.

The lantern bobbed up the slope. As it reached the tavern gateway, the minister saw that it was now carried by a tall, active man, who walked with a seaman's stride and roll. Captain Eben was close beside him, talking excitedly.

They entered the yard. "Grace! Grace!" screamed Captain Eben. "Grace, girl, look who's come! Look!"

The tall man ran forward. "Hi, Grace!" he cried in a deep, hearty voice. "Is that you? Ain't you got a word for your old messmate?"

The girl stepped out into the rain. "Why! why, Nat!" she cried.

The big man picked her up bodily in his arms and carried her into the house. Captain Eben followed and the door closed.

John Ellery picked his way homeward through the puddles and the pouring rain.

He found Keziah in the sitting room, seated by the table, evidently writing a letter. She looked tired and grave for her.

"Well!" she exclaimed as he entered. "I guess you're soppin' now, sartin' sure. There's a light in your room. Take off your wet things and throw 'em down to me, and I'll dry 'em in the kitchen. Better leave your boots here now and stand that umbrella in the sink. The kettle's on the stove; you'd better have somethin' hot—ginger tea or somethin'." I told you not to go out such a night as this. Where in the world have you been?"

The minister said he would tell her all about it in the morning. Just now he thought he had better go up and take off his wet clothes.

Keziah dipped her pen in the ink and went on with her letter.

"I inclose ten dollars," she wrote. "It is all I can send you now. More than I ought to afford. Goodness knows why I send anything. You don't deserve it. But while I live and you do I can't—"

The minister called from the landing. "Here is my coat," he said. "The cuffs and lower part of the sleeves are pretty wet. By the way, the pack came in to-night. They didn't expect her so soon on account of the fog. There was a passenger aboard whom I think must be that Nathaniel Hammond you told me of."

Keziah's pen stopped. The wet coat struck the hall floor with a soft thump. The tick of the clock sounded loud in the room. A sheet of wind-driven rain lashed the windows.

"Did you hear?" called the minister. "I said that Nathaniel Hammond, Captain Eben's son, came on the packet. I didn't meet him, but I'm sure it was he. Er—Mrs. Coffin, are you there? Do you hear me?"

The housekeeper laid the pen down beside the unfinished letter.

"Yes," she said, "I hear you. Good-night."

For minutes she sat there, leaning back in her chair and staring at the wall. Then she rose, went into the hall, picked up the coat, and took it out into the kitchen, where she hung it on the clotheshorse by the cook stove. After a while she returned to the table and took up the pen. Her face in the lamplight looked more tired and grave than ever.

CHAPTER V.

In Which Old Friends Meet. When Ellery came down to breakfast the rain was over, the wind had gone down, and the morning sunshine was pouring in at the dining-room windows. Outside the lilacs were in bud, the bluebirds were singing, and there was a sniff of real spring

in the air. The storm was at an end and yet the young minister was conscious of a troublesome feeling that, for him, it was just beginning.

However, he had determined while dressing to make a clean breast of it to his housekeeper—a nominally clean breast, that is. So, as they sat opposite each other at the table, he began his confession. The muffins scorched in the oven and the coffeepot boiled over as he told his story, for Keziah was too much interested to think of trifles. Interested and astounded, for since Come-Outers had been Come-Outers and the split in the society took place, no Regular minister had crossed the threshold of a seceder's dwelling, much less attended their services and walked home with a member of their congregation. She knew what this amazing procedure was likely to mean, if her parson did not.

"Well!" she exclaimed when the recital was finished. "Well!"

"I'm afraid I was too hasty," observed Mr. Ellery thoughtfully. "Perhaps it would have been wiser not to have done it."

"Perhaps 'twould. Yes, I wouldn't wonder a mite."

"It will be talked about some, I suppose. Don't you think so?"

"At this moment one half of Trumet is talkin' about it and runnin' out to tell the other half. I guess I'd better hurry up with this breakfast. We're goin' to have callers."

Strange to say, however, this prophecy of early morning visitors did not prove true. Nine o'clock, then ten, and no visitor came to the parsonage. Mrs. Coffin affirmed that she did not understand it. Where was Didama? Where Lavinia Pepper? Had the "Trumet Daily Advertiser" suspended publication?

At half past ten the gate slammed. Keziah peered from the window.

"Humph!" she ejaculated. "Here comes Elkanah and he's got storm signals set, by the looks. He's comin' after you, Mr. Ellery."

"Very well," was the calm reply; "let him come."

"All right. Say, Mr. Ellery, it's none of my business, but I wouldn't say anything about your seein' Grace home. That's none of his business, either, or anybody else's."

The head of the parish committee stalked into the study and the door closed behind him. A rumble of voices in animated conversation succeeded.

Mrs. Coffin went out into the kitchen and resumed her business of making a dried-apple pie.

She was looking down below the door, which opened outward and was swung partly back on its hinges. From under the door projected a boot, a man's boot and one of ample size.

Keziah's cheeks, already red from the heat of the stove, reddened still more. Her lips twitched and her eyes sparkled.

"Hum!" she said. "They say you can tell the Old Scratch by his foot-prints, even if you can't smell the sulphur. Anyhow, you can tell a Hammond by the size of his boots. Come out from behind that door this minute. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

The owner of the boot stepped forth from behind the door and seized her by both hands.

"Halloo, Keziah!" he cried joyfully. "My, but it's good to see you."

"Halloo, Nat!" said Keziah heartily. "It's kind of good to see you, too."

The rest of him was in keeping with his boots. He was big and broad-shouldered and bearded. His face, above the beard, was tanned to a deep reddish brown, and the corners of his eyes were marked with dozens of tiny wrinkles. He was dressed in blue cloth and wore a wide-brimmed, soft felt hat. He entered the kitchen and tossed the hat into a corner.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "Why don't you act surprised to see a feller? Here I've been cruisin' from the Horn to Bernegat and back again, and you act as if I'd just dropped in to fetch the cup of molasses I borrowed yesterday. What do you mean by it?"

"Oh, I heard you'd made port."

"Did, hey? That's Trumet, sure pop. You ain't the only one. I sneaked off across lots so's to dodge the gang of neighbors that I knew would be sailin' into our yard, the whole fleet loaded to the gunwale with questions. Wanted to see you, first, Keziah."

Mrs. Coffin pulled forward one of the kitchen chairs. He seated himself on it and it groaned under his weight.

"Whew!" he whistled. "Never made to stand rough weather, was it? Well, ain't you glad?"

Keziah looked at him gravely. "You know I'm glad, Nat," she said. "So? I hoped you would be, but I did want to hear you say it. Now you come to anchor yourself and let's have a talk. I've been countin' on it ever since we set tops'ls off Surinam."

The housekeeper took the other chair.

"I beg your pardon, Keziah," he said. "I'm a dough head, that's a fact. I hadn't forgot about Sol, but I was so glad to be home again and to see dad and Grace and the old town and you that everything else flew out of my mind. Poor Sol! I liked him."

"He liked you, too. No wonder, considerin' what you did to—"

"Belay! Never mind that. Poor chap! Well, he's rid of his sufferin' at last. Tell me about it, if you can without bringin' all the trouble back too plain."

So she told him of her brother's sickness and death, of having to give up the old home, and, finally, of her acceptance of the housekeeper's position. He listened, at first with sympathy and then with suppressed indignation.

"By the jumpin' Moses!" he exclaimed. "And Elkanah was goin' to turn you out of house and home. The men, pompos old—"

"Hush! hush, he's in there with Mr. Ellery."

"Who? Elkanah?"

"Yes; they're in the study."

"So he's talkin' to the new parson, hey? Bossin' him, too, I'll bet."

"I ain't so sure. Mr. Ellery's young, but he's got a mind of his own."

Captain Hammond chuckled and slapped his knee.

"Ho, ho!" he laughed. "I've been hearin' somethin' about that mind. Went to the chapel last night, I understand, and he and dad had a set-to. Oh, I heard about it! Wish I might have been there."

"How does your father act about it?"

"'Bout the way a red-hot stove acts when you spill water on it; every time he thinks of the minister he sizzles. Ho, ho! I do wish I could have been there."

"What does Grace say?"

"Oh, she doesn't say much I wouldn't wonder if she felt the way I do, though we both keep quiet. I'll tell you, between ourselves and the ship's pump, that I sort of glory in the young chap's spunk."

"Good! So do I. I like him."

Her friend leaned forward. "There's no sense in your slavin' yourself to death here. I can think of a good deal pleasanter berth than that. Pleasant or for me, anyhow, and I'd do my best to make it pleasant for you. You've only got to say the word and— No? Well, then all I can do is hope through another voyage."

"Please don't, Nat. You know."

"No, I don't know."

"Well, perhaps you don't. But I know, I like you, Nat. I count on you as the straightest, truest friend I've got; and I want to keep on countin' on you just that way. Mayn't I?"

"Course you can, Keziah. But—"

"Then don't say another word, please."

"Keziah, when you set your foot down you're pretty stubborn; but I've got somethin' of a foot myself. You remember you said so a few minutes ago. Hi, hum! Well, speakin' of dad reminds me that I'm kind of worried about him."

"You are? Why? Isn't he well?"

"Pretty well; but he ain't strong, and he gets too excited over things like last night's foolishness. Grace tells me that the doctor says he must be careful or he'll drop off some of these days. He had a shock five or six years ago, a little one, and I've been anxious about him ever since."

"You mustn't worry. How did Grace look to you?"

"Like the harbor light on a stormy night. She's a brick, that girl, and gets prettier every minute. Wonder to me some of the young chaps down here don't carry her off by main strength. She'll make somebody a good wife."

"Um-hm. Have—have you ever thought of her that way yourself?"

"Keziah, that's enough of that. Are you and dad in partnership to get me spliced and out of the way? He was at me this mornin' along the same line. Don't say anything like that again, even in fun. You know why?"

"All right, all right. Now tell me about yourself. Have you had a good voyage? How do you like your owners? How did Zach Foster ever get the packet in through yesterday's fog?"

"Voyage was all right. Some rugged weather on the trip out, but homeward bound we slid along like a shub bucket on a greased plank. Owners are all right. Good people as ever I sailed for. As for Zach and the pack et— Ho, ho! Somebody's comin'; I'm goin' to clear out. I don't want to be put through my catechism yet a while."

"No, you mustn't go. I want you to meet Mr. Ellery. You sit out on the wash bench by the back door till I get rid of whoever 'tis that's comin'. Scott!"

Nat "scoted," stopping to snatch up his hat as he ran. Keziah went into the dining room and admitted Captain

Zebedee Mayo, who was panting from the exertion of his walk.

"Whew!" puffed Captain Zeb mopping his forehead. "How be you, Keziah? What? You ain't all alone! Thought you'd have a cabin full of gab machines by this time. Have they been and gone?"

"No, they haven't been. I— My land, my pie!"

She rushed into the kitchen and snatched the pastry from the oven. Her new caller followed her.

"So they ain't been, hey?" he said. "That's queer."

"Elkanah's here. He's in there with the minister now."

"He is? Givin' the young feller Hall Columby, I callate. Well, now, he shan't. He, he! When they told me how the minister passed old hop-and-go-fetch-it what was due him at the chapel last night I riz up and boorayed tell my wife shut the windows. She said the neighbors all thought I was loony, anyhow, and I needn't prove it to 'em. He, he! But Elkanah ain't got any funny bone. He's as solemn as a stuffed owl, and he'll— Well, I'm goin' to put my ear in. I'm parish committee, too, I callate, and I've got somethin' to say, even if I wa'n't christened Daniels. Here goes!"

He headed for the study, but before he crossed the threshold of the kitchen Ellery and his visitor came out into the dining room. Captain Elkanah's face was flushed, and he sizzled. The minister looked determined but calm.

"Ahoy there, Elkanah!" hailed Zebedee cheerfully. "Mornin', Mr. Ellery. Been havin' officers' counsel, have you?"

"Good morning, Captain Mayo," said the minister.

"Mornin', Zebedee," grunted Elkanah. "I have—hum—has—been discussin' the regrettable affair of last



"Ahoy There, Elkanah!" Hailed Zebedee. Cheerfully.

night with Mr. Ellery. I have tried—hum—ha! to show him that respectable people of our society don't associate with Come-Outers, and that for a Regular minister to go to their meetings is something neither the congregation nor the parish committee approve of. No—er—hum—ha! no!"

"And I explained to Captain Daniels," observed the minister, "that I went there for what seemed to me good reasons, and, as they did seem to me good at the time, I'm not ashamed of having gone. It was an honest mistake on my part and I may make more."

"But the society—" began Elkanah. Captain Zeb interrupted him.

"Don't worry about the society, Mr. Ellery," he said with emphasis. "Not about the parish committee, either. Great fishhooks! the most of us are tickled to death over what you said to Eben Hammond. We think it's a mighty good joke. You didn't know, of course, and what you did was done innocent. He! he! he! Did you lay him out, hey?"

"I think you'll find a good many of the society feel as I do, shocked and—hum—ha!—sorry. I'm surprised they haven't been here to say so."

"I expected them," remarked the minister.

"So did I," chimed in Captain Zeb. "But I callate to know why they ain't been. They're all too busy crowin' over the way Nat Hammond fetched the packet home last night. You ain't heard, Keziah, have you? Nor you, Mr. Ellery? Well, I must tell you. Here's where I gain a lap on Didama Rogers. Seems the Deborah S.—that's the packet's name, Mr. Ellery—she hauled out of Boston night after last on the ebb, with a fair wind and sky clear as a bell. But they hadn't much more'n got outside of Minot's 'fore the fog shut down, thicker'n gruel for a sick man. The wind held till 'long toward mornin'; then she flattened to a dead calm. 'Bije Perry, the mate, he spun the yarn to me, and he said 'twas thick and fat as ever he had and kept gettin' no better fast."

"They drifted along till noon time and then they was somewheres out in the bay, but that's about all you could say. Zach, he was stewin' and spatterin' like a pair of fried eels, and Lafayette Gage and Emulous Peters—they're Danboro folks, Mr. Ellery, and about sixteen pints 'o'her side of no account—they was the only passengers aboard except Nat Hammond, and they put in their time playin' high low jack in the cabin. The lookout was forward tootin' a tin horn and his belerins was the most excitin' thing going on. After dinner—corned beef and cabbage—trust Zach for that, though 't's next door to cannibalism to put cabbage in his mouth—after dinner all hands was on deck when Nat says: 'Hush! he says. 'Don't I hear some-thing?'"

"They listened, and then they all heard it—all 'cept Zach, who's deaf in his larboard ear."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

SNAPSHOTS AT STATE NEWS

All Pennsylvania Gleaned for Items of Interest.

REPORTS ABOUT CROPS GOOD

Farmers Busy in Every Locality—Churches Raising Funds for Many Worthy Objects—Items of Business and Pleasure that Interest.

The Schuylkill Canal is being repaired for opening of navigation.

Howard Sharp, a burglar who escaped from the Sunbury jail, was captured at Shamokin.

Bunker Hill Grange, Annville, will establish a free library for farmers in its new hall.

A car brake slipped and the stick broke three ribs for brakeman Abraham Warner, of Cressona.

Operator Lawrence Barker was severely burned by a film fire in a moving picture show, at Minersville.

The only two children of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Dengler, of Lancaster, died from diphtheria within 24 hours.

The Norristown Trust Company has adopted the finger-print system for depositors.

Charles Lawrence was dragged nearly a block in stopping a runaway horse in Conshohocken.

The fine large bulldog of Congressman Thomas S. Butler, West Chester, died from poison.

A Williamsport taxidermist is mounting 267 moose, elk, caribou and deer heads sent from Newfoundland.

The Bachelor Club, at Trevorton, has disbanded, owing to lack of interest on the part of the members.

Simon Brown, a boiler-maker employed in the Frick Company shops at Waynesboro, fell dead of heart disease at work.

Dr. Phoebe J. Hagenbach celebrated her eighty-first birthday at Stroudsburg, where she has practiced medicine for 34 years.

The Lebanon Valley Electric Company may extend its wires into Jonestown. The connection will be made with the company's system, several miles from Jonestown.

The J. Lewis Crozer Hospital, at Chester, has been equipped with the latest type of X-ray machine at the expense of Mrs. J. Lewis Crozer, widow of the founder.

In the Chester County Court the trial jury awarded Joseph Adens \$150 for a horse which died from injuries received by a fall in a hole in the road in West Cain township.

Louis C. Leasig, a Pottstown ironmaster, has caught a tarpon more than six feet long and weighing 132 pounds, at Punta Gorda, Fla., the first landed there this season.

Falling from a third-story window and escaping with only a few slight scratches, was a providential escape for Esther, the two-year-old child of Chester Beyers, of Morgantown.

Waynesboro's Council passed an ordinance prohibiting the carrying of liquor into borough buildings, a practice that ended in two firemen being sent to the penitentiary after they had set fire to a barn.

Eva Baker, aged 17 years, of North Seventh street, Philadelphia, was taken into custody by Norristown police, at the instance of her father, Harvey Baker, who alleged she was eloping with an alien.

Although only 13 years old, Clyde Brantana, of Somerset county, is six feet six inches tall, and is still growing. He has been wearing long trousers for the last two years, and his bill for clothing is expensive because he outgrows a suit long before it has become well worn. Although only a normal-sized child at first, the boy grown rapidly during the last two years. It is expected that he will add several more inches to his stature before he reaches his full development. The lad is well developed and strong. He weighs in the neighborhood of 200 pounds. Because of his size, it has been necessary to have a special bed constructed, because the ordinary bed is not long enough by several inches.

More than \$25,000 was raised by the First United Evangelical Church, of Reading, during the closing conference year, and for the good work done the Rev. A. J. Brunner, the pastor, has given a complimentary offering of \$125.

More than 300 voters of all parties signed a petition to Governor Tener to appoint H. Claude Bell, Democrat, justice of the Peace in the Ninth ward of Pottstown, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Thomas G. Rutter.

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