century ago, the pretty feathery pale green shrub grew in every country door yard, humble or great, throughout new england; and every church going woman picked a branch or spray of it when she left her home on sabbath morn. to this day, on hot summer sundays, many a staid old daughter of the puritans may be seen entering the village meeting house, clad in a lilac sprigged lawn or a green striped barège, a scanty skirted, surplice waisted relic of past summers, with a lace bordered silk cape or a delicate, time yellowed, purple and white cashmere scarf on her bent shoulders, wearing on her gray head a shirred silk or leghorn bonnet, and carrying in her lace mitted hand a fresh handkerchief, her spectacle case and well worn bible, and a great sprig of the sweet, old fashioned lads love. a rose, a bunch of mignonette would be to her too gay a posy for the lords house and the lords day. and balmier breath than was ever borne by blossom is the pure fragrance of green growing things, southernwood, mint, sweet fern, bayberry, sweetbrier. no rose is half so fresh, so countrified, so memory sweet. the benches and the pew seats in the old churches were never cushioned. occasionally very old or feeble women brought cushions to meeting to sit upon. it is a matter of recent tradition that colonel greenleaf caused a nine days talk in newbury town at the beginning of this century when he cushioned his pew. the widow of sir william pepperell, who lived in imposing style, had her pew cushioned and lined and curtained with worsted stuff, and carpeted with a heavy bear skin. this worn, faded, and moth eaten furniture remained in the kittery church until the year, just as when lady pepperell furnished and occupied the pew. nor were even the seats of the pulpit cushioned. the cooshoons of velvet or leather, best they could. as she stood, much bent, but propped on her ivory crutches, eagerly following every word of a conversation, she looked as though she were prepared at any moment to spring into the middle of it and interrupt the speaker. she always said exactly what she meant without reserve or ruth; and throughout her long life, as the mistress of great wealth, she had always been allowed to have her own way. she asserted her rights even over her son, though he was the centre of a web whose threads reached to the furthest circumference of the known world. the peasants who tilled the earth by the upper and lower nile, the shepherds who kept their flocks in the arabian desert, in syria, or on the silphium meads of cyrenaica, the wood cutters of lebanon and pontus, the mountaineers of hispania and sardinia, the brokers, merchants, and skippers of every port on the mediterranean, were bound by these threads to the villa on the shore of mareotis, and felt the tie when the master there docile as a boy to his mothers will tightened or released his hold. his possessions, even in his youth, had been so vast that their increment could bring no added enjoyment to him or his family, and yet their increase had become his lifes task. he strove for a higher sum to figure on the annual balance sheet, as eagerly as an athlete strives for a prize; and his mother not only inspected the account, but watched every important undertaking with keen interest. when her son and his colleagues doubted over some decision it was she who gave the casting vote; but though her advice in most cases proved sound and profitable, church and town records, we plainly discover that each laic, deacon, elder, criminal, singer, and even the ungodly boy had his alloted place as absolutely assigned to him in the old meeting house as was the pulpit to the parson. much has been said in semi ridicule of this old custom of seating and dignifying, yet it did not in reality differ much from our modern way of selling the best pews to whoever will pay the most. perhaps the old way was the better, since, in the early churches, age, education, dignity, and reputation were considered as well as wealth. vi. the tithingman and the sleepers. the most grotesque, the most extraordinary, the most highly colored figure in the dull new england church life was the tithingman. this fairly burlesque creature impresses me always with a sense of unreality, of incongruity, of strange happening, like a jesting clown in a procession of monks, like a strain of low comedy in the sober religious drama of early new england puritan life; so out of place, so unreal is this fussy, pompous, restless tithingman, with his fantastic wand of office fringed with dangling foxtails, creaking, bustling, strutting, peering around the quiet meeting house, prodding and rapping the restless boys, waking the drowsy sleepers; for they slept in country churches in the