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Author: W. Hamilton Gibson

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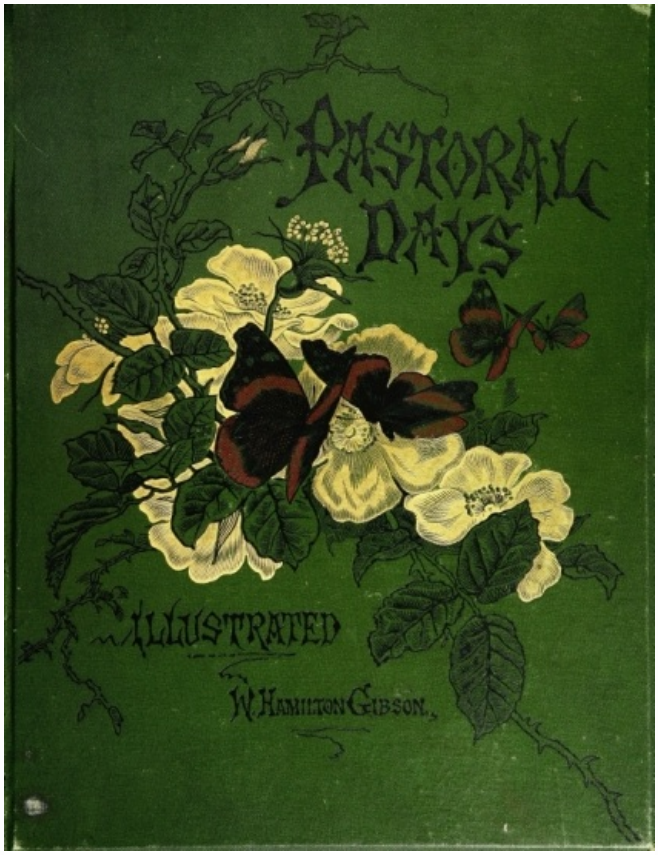


PASTORAL DAYS

PASTORAL DAYS

OR

MEMORIES OF A NEW ENGLAND YEAR

BY
W. HAMILTON GIBSON

Illustrated

NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS, FRANKLIN SQUARE
1881

TO

ONE WHOSE CLOSE COMPANIONSHIP

HAS WROUGHT THAT HARMONY AND PEACE OF MIND FROM WHICH THIS
BOOK HAS SPRUNG, AND TO WHOM ITS EVERY PAGE RECALLS
A REMINISCENCE OF THE PAST IDENTIFIED
WITH MEMORIES OF MY OWN

This Memoir is Lovingly Inscribed

OUR SOUVENIR

THE CYCLE.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

DESIGNED BY
W. HAMILTON GIBSON.

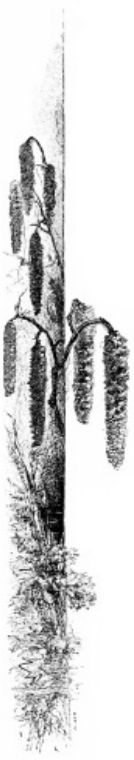
Spring.

AS far as the eye can reach, the snow lies in a deep mantle over the cheerless landscape. I look out upon a dreary moor, where the horizon melts into the cold gray of a heavy sky. The restless wind sweeps with pitiless blast through shivering trees and over bleak hills, from whose crests, like a great white veil, the clouds of hoary flakes are lifted and drawn along by the gale. Down the upland slope, across the undulating field, the blinding drift, like a thing of life, speeds in its wild caprice, now swirling in fantastic eddies around some isolated stack, half hidden in its chill embrace, now winding away over bare-blown wall and scraggy fence, and through the sighing willows near the frozen stream; now with a wild whirl it flies aloft, and the dark pines and hemlocks on the mountain-side fade away in its icy mist. Again, yonder it appears trailing along the meadow, until, flying like some fugitive spirit chased from earth by the howling wind, it vanishes in the sky. On every side these winged phantoms lead their flying chase across the dreary landscape, and fence and barn and house upon the hill in turn are dimmed or lost to sight.

Who has not watched the strange antics of the drifting snow whirling past the window on a blustering winter's day? But this is not a winter's day. This is the advent of a New England spring.

Fortunate are we that its promises are not fulfilled, for the ides of March might as oft betoken the approach of a tempestuous winter as of a balmy spring. Consecrated to Mars and Tantalus, it is a month of contradictions and disappointments, of broken promises and incessant warfare. It is the struggle of tender awakening life against the buffetings of rude and blighting elements. No man can tell what a day may bring forth. Now we look out verily upon bleak December; to-morrow—who knows?—we may be transported into May, and, with aspirations high, feel our ardor cooled by a blast of ice and a blinding fall of snow. But this cannot always last, for soon the southern breezes come and hold their sway for days, and the north wind, angry in its defeat, is driven back in lowering clouds to the region of eternal ice and snow. Then comes a lovely day, without even a cloud—all blue above, all dazzling white below. The sun shines with a glowing warmth, and we say unto ourselves, "This is, indeed, a harbinger of spring." The sugar-maples throb and trickle with the flowing sap, and the lumbering ox-team and sled wind through the woods from tree to tree to relieve the overflowing buckets. The boiling caldron in the sugar-house near by receives the continual supply, and gives forth that sweet-scented steam that issues from the open door, and comes to us in occasional welcome whiffs across the snow. Long "wedges" of wild-geese are seen cleaving the sky in their northward flight. The little pussies on the willows are coaxed from their winter nest, and creep out upon the stem. The solitary bluebird makes his appearance, flitting along the thickets and stone walls with little hesitating warble, as if it were not yet the appointed time to sing; and down among the bogs, that cautious little pioneer, the swamp-cabbage flower, peers above the ground beneath his purple-spotted hood. He knows the fickle month which gives him birth, and keeps well under cover.

Such days in March are too perfect to endure, and at night the sky is overcast and dark. Then follows a long warm rain that unlocks the ice in all the streams. The whiteness of the hills and meadows melts into broad contracting strips and patches. One by one, as mere specks upon the landscape, these vanish in turn, until the last vestige of winter is washed from the face of the earth to swell the tide of the rushing stream. Even now, from the distant valley, we hear a continuous muffled roar, as the mighty freshet, impelled by an irresistible force, ploughs its tortuous channel through the lowlands and ravines. The quiet town is filled with an unusual commotion. Excited groups of towns-people crowd the village store, and eager voices tell of the havoc wrought by the fearful flood. We hear how the old toll-bridge, with tollman's house and all, was lifted from its piers like a pile of straw, and whirled away upon the current. How its floating timbers, in a great blockade, crushed into the old mill-pond; how the dam had burst, and the rickety red saw-mill gone to pieces down the stream. Farmer Nathan's barn had gone, and his flat meadows were like a whirling sea, strewn with floating rails and driftwood. Every hour records its new disaster as some eager messenger returns from the excited crowds which line the river-bank. How well I remember the fascinating excitement of the spring freshet as I watched the rising water in the big swamp lot, anxious lest it might creep up and undermine the wall foundations of the barn! And what a royal raft I made from the drifting logs and beams, and with the spirit of an adventurous explorer sailed out on the deep gliding



CATKINS.

current, floating high among the branches of the half submerged willow-trees, and scraping over the tips of the tallest alder-bushes, whose highest twigs now hardly reached the surface! How deep and dark the water looked as I lay upon the raft and peered into the depths below! But this jolly fun was of but short duration. The flood soon subsided, and on the following morning nothing was seen excepting the settlings of *débris* strewn helter-skelter over the meadow, and hanging on all the bushes.

The tepid rain has penetrated deep into the yielding ground, and with the winter's frost now coming to the surface, the roads are well-nigh impassable with their plethora of mud. For a full appreciation of *mud* in all its glory, and in its superlative degree, one should see a New England highway "when the frost comes out of the ground." The roads are furrowed with deep grimy ruts, in which the bedabbled wheels sink to their hubs as in a quicksand, and the hoofs of the floundering horse are held in the swampy depths as if in a vise. For a week or more this state of things continues, until at length, after warm winds and sunny days, the ground once more packs firm beneath the tread. This marks the close of idle days. The junk pile in the barn is invaded, and the rusty plough abstracted from the midst of rakes and scythes and other farming tools. The old white horse thrusts his long head from the stall near by, and whinnies at the memories it revives, and with pricked-up ears and whisking tail tells plainly of the eagerness he feels.

PUSSIES.

EARLY PLOUGHING.

Back and forth through the sloping lot the ploughman slowly turns the dingy sward, and in the rich brown furrow, following in his track, we see the cackling troop of hens, and the lordly rooster, with great ado, searches out the dainty tidbits for his motley crowd of favorites. The whole landscape has become infused with human life and motion. Wherever the eye may turn it sees the evidences of varied and hopeful industry. Yonder we notice an oft-recurring little puff of mist, like a burlesque snow-drift, ever and anon bursting into view, and softly vanishing against the sward; another glance detects the slow progress of horse and cart, as the farmer sows his load of plaster across the whitening field. Farther up, where the brow of the hill stands clear against the sky, a pacing figure, with measured sweep of arm, scatters the handfuls of wheat, and team and harrow soon are in his path, combing and crumbling the dark-brown mould. High curling wreaths of smoke wind upward from the flat swamp lot beyond, where hilarious boys enjoy both work and play in burning off the brush. Here we shall see the first welcome nibble of fresh grass for the poor bereaved cow, whose lamenting bleat now echoes through the barn near by; and for those oxen, too, that with swaying, clumsy gait lug the huge roller across the neighboring field. And what strange yells and exclamations guide them in their labored progress! "Ho back! Gee up, ahoy! Ho haw!" From every direction, in voices near, and others faint with distance, we hear this same queer jargon. Who could believe that so much good work hung upon the incessant reiteration of that brief and monotonous vocabulary? Rather would we listen to the musical ring of the laughing children riding on the big "brush harrow" down through that barn-yard lane beyond. Now they are out upon the broken ground where John has strewn the "compost" to be "brushed in." A broad flat wake follows them around the field, and that same troop of hens and turkeys revel in the lively feast spread out before them in the loose upturning.

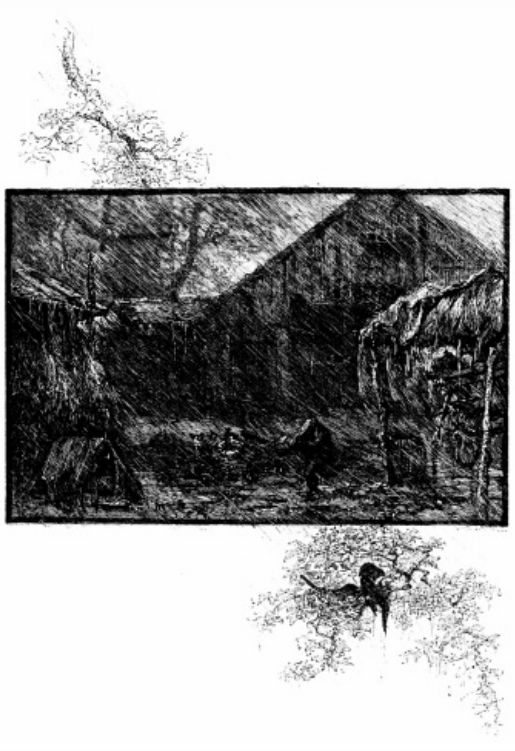
RETURN FROM THE FIELDS.

So runs the record of a busy day in the early New England springtime, and with its all-absorbing industry it is a day that passes quickly. The afternoon runs into evening. Cool shadows creep across the landscape as the glowing sun sinks through the still bare and leafless trees and disappears behind the wooded hills. The fields are now deserted, and through the uncertain twilight we see the little knots of workmen with their swinging pails, and hear their tramp along the homeward road. In the dim shadows of the evergreens beyond, a faint gray object steals into view. Now it stops at the old watering-trough, and I hear the sip of the eager horse and the splash of overflowing water. Some belated ploughman, fresh, perhaps, from a half-hour's gossip at the village store. I hear the sound of hoofs upon the stones as they renew their way, the dragging of the chain upon the gravelly

bed, and the receding form is lost in the darkening road. One by one the scattered barns and houses have disappeared in the gathering dusk, marked only by the faint columns of blue smoke that rise above the trees, and melt away against the twilight sky. I look out upon a wilderness of gloom, where all above is still and clear, and all below is wrapped in impenetrable mystery. A plaintive piping trill now breaks the impressive stillness. Again and again I hear the little lonely voice vibrating through the low-lying mist. It is only a little frog in some far-off marsh; but what a sweet sense of sadness is awakened by that lowly melody! How its weird minor key, with its magic touch, unlocks the treasures of the heart. Only the peeping of a frog; but where in all the varied voices of the night, where, even among the great chorus of nature's sweetest music, is there another song so lulling in its dreamy melody, so full of that emotive charm which quickens the human heart? How often in the vague spring twilight have I yielded to the strange, fascinating melancholy awakened by the frog's low murmur at the water's edge! How many times have I lingered near some swampy roadside bog, and let these little wizards weave their mystic spell about my willing senses, while the very air seemed to quiver in the fulness of their song! I remember the tangle of tall and withered rushes, through whose mysterious depths the eye in vain would strive to penetrate at the sound of some faint splash or ripple, or perhaps at the quaint, high-keyed note of some little isolated hermit, piping in his sombre solitude. I recall the first glimpse of the rising moon, as its great golden face peered out at me from over the distant hill, enclosing half the summit against its broad and luminous surface. Slowly and steadily it seemed to steal into view, until, risen in all its fulness, I caught its image in the trembling ripples at the edge of the soggy pool, where the palpitating water responded to the frog's low, tremulous monotone. Higher and higher it sails across the inky sky, its glow now changed to a silvery pallor, across whose white halo, in a floating film, the ghostly clouds glide in their silent flight. A dull tinkling of some distant cow-bell breaks the spell, and recalls my wandering thoughts, and as I again take up my way along the moonlit road, the glimmering windows on right and left betray the hiding-places of a score of humble homes. Not far beyond I see the swinging motion of a flickering lantern, as some tardy farmer's boy, whistling about his work, clears up his nightly chores. Now he enters the old barn-door. I see the light glinting through the open cracks, and hear the lowing of the cows, the bleating of the baby-calf, and rattling chains of oxen in the stanchion rows. Now again I catch the gleam at the open door; the swinging light flits across the yard, and the old corn-crib starts from its obscurity. I see the boyish figure relieved against the glow within as a basketful of yellow ears are gathered for the impatient mouths in the noisy manger stalls. Sing on, my boy, enjoy it while you may! That venerable barn will yield a fragrance to you in after-life that will conjure up in your heart a throng of memories as countless as the shining grains that glimmer in the light you hold, and as golden, too, as they. I wonder if those soft-winged bats squeak among the clapboards, or make their fluttering zigzag swoops about your lantern as they were wont to do in olden times.

VOICES OF THE NIGHT.

Then there was that big-eyed owl, too, that perched upon the maple-tree outside my window, and cried as if its heart would break at the doleful tidings it foretold. What a world of kind solicitude that dolorous bird awakened in our superstitious neighbor across the road! How she overwhelmed us with her sympathy, aroused by that sepulchral omen! But I still live, and so does the owl, for aught I know; and I sometimes think that this aged, stooping dame over the way has never fully recovered from her disappointment, for she always greets me with a sigh and an injured expression, as she says, in her high and tremulous voice, "Well! well! back agin ez hale 'n hearty 's ever; an' arter the way thet ar witch bird yewst teu call ye, too, night arter night. Jest teu *think* on't! an' we'd all a' gi'n ye up fer sartin. Well! well! I never see the beat on't. Yen deu seem teu hang on *paowerful*;" and, after a moment's hesitation, seemingly in which to swallow the bitter pill, she usually adds, with sad solicitude, "Feelin' perty *tol'ble teu*, I spose?" But the "witch bird" never roused my serious apprehensions. I remember its plaintive cry only as a tender bit of pathos in the pages of my early history.



I recall, too, the pleasant sound upon the shingles overhead as the dark-clouded sky let fall its tell-tale drops to warn us of the coming rain. How many times have I glided into dream-land under the drowsy influence of the patter on the roof, and the ever varying tattoo upon the tin beneath the dripping eaves! Who can forget those rainy days, with their games of hide-and-seek in the old dark garret! How we looked out upon the muddy puddled road, and laughed at the great drifting sheets of water that ever and anon poured down from some bursting cloud, and roared upon the roof! And as the driving rain beat against the blurred window-panes, what strange capers the squirming tree-trunks outside seemed to play for our amusement: the dark door-way of the barn, too—now swelling out to twice its size, now stretching long and thin, or dividing in the middle in its queer contortions. Out in the dismal barn-yard we saw the forlorn row of hens huddled together on the hay-rick, under the drizzling straw-thatched shed; and the gabled coop near by, in whose dry retreat the motherly old hen spread her tawny wings, and yielded the warmth of her ruffled breast to the tender needs of her little family, peeping so contentedly beneath her. The rain-proof ducks dabble in the neighboring puddles, and chew the muddy water in search of floating dainties, or gulp with nodding heads the unlucky angle-worms which come struggling to the surface—drowned out of their subterranean tunnels.

Now we hear the snapping of the latch at the foot of the garret stairs, and we are called to come and see a little outcast that John has brought in from the wood-pile. Close beside the kitchen-stove a doubled piece of blanket lies upon the floor, and within its folds we find what once was a downy little chicken, now drenched and dying from exposure. He was a naughty, wayward child, and would persist in thinking that he knew more than his mother. At least so I was told—indeed, it was impressed upon me. But the little fellow was rescued just in time. The warmth will soon revive him, and by-and-by we shall hear his little chirp and see him trot around the kitchen-floor, pecking at that everlasting fly, perhaps, or at some tiny red-hot coal that snaps out from the stove.

Little did we suspect the mission of those rainy days, so drear and dismal without, or the sweet surprise preparing for us in the myriad mysteries of life beneath the sod, where every root and thread-like rootlet in the thirsty earth was drinking in that welcome moisture, and numberless sleeping germs, dwelling in darkness, were awakening into life to seek the light of day, waiting only for the glory of a sunny dawn to burst forth from their hiding-places! That sunny morn does come at last, and in its beams it sheds abroad a power that stirs the deepest root. It is, indeed, a glorious day. The clustered buds upon the silver-maples burst in their exuberance, and fringe the graceful branches with their silken tassels. The restless crocus, for months an unwilling captive in its winter prison, can contain itself no longer, and with its little overflowing cup lifts up its face to the blue heaven. Golden daffodils burst into bloom on drooping stems, and exchange their little nods on right and left. The air is filled with a faint perfume, in which the very earth mould yields its fragrance—that wild aroma only known to spring. Our little feathered friends, so few and far between as yet, are full of song. The bluebird wooes his mate with a loving warble, full of tender sweetness, as they flit among the swaying twigs, or pry with diligent search for some snug nesting-place among the hollow crannies of the orchard trees. The noisy blackbirds hold high carnival in the top of the old pine-tree, the woodpecker taps upon the hollow limb his resonant tattoo, and the hungry crows, like a posse of tramps, hang around the great oak-tree upon the knoll, and watch to see what they can steal. Down through the meadow the gurgling stream babbles as of old, and along its fretted banks the alder thickets are hanging full with drooping catkins swinging at every breeze. The glossy willow-buds throw off their coat of fur, and plume themselves in their wealth of inflorescence, lighting up the brook-side with a yellow glow, and exhaling a fresh, delicious perfume. Here, too, we hear the rattling screech of the swooping kingfisher, as with quick beats of wing he skims along the surface of the stream, and with an ascending glide settles upon the overhanging branch above the ripples. All these and a thousand more I vividly recall from the memory of that New England spring; but sweetest of all its manifold surprises was that crowning consummation, that miracle of a single night, bringing on countless wings through the early morning mist the welcome chorus of the returning flocks of birds. How they swarmed the orchard and the elms, where but yesterday the bluebird held his sway! Now we see the fiery oriole in his gold and jetty velvet flashing in the morning sun, and robins without number swell their ruddy throats in a continuous roundelay of song. The pert cat-bird in his Quaker garb is here, and with flippant jerk of tail and impertinent mew bustles about among the arbor-vitæs, where even now are remnants of his last year’s nest. The puffy wrens, too, what saucy, sputtering little bursts of glee are theirs as they strut upon the rustic boxes in the maples! The fields are vocal with their sweet spring medley, in which the happy carols of the linnets and the song sparrows form a continuous pastoral. Now we hear the mellow bell of the wood thrush echoing from some neighboring tree, and all intermingled with the chatter and the gossip of the martens on their lofty house. Birds in the sky, birds in the trees and on the ground, birds everywhere, and not a silent throat among them; but from far and near, from mountain-side and meadow, from earth and sky, uniting in a happy choral of perpetual jubilee.

A HANDFUL FROM THE WOODS.

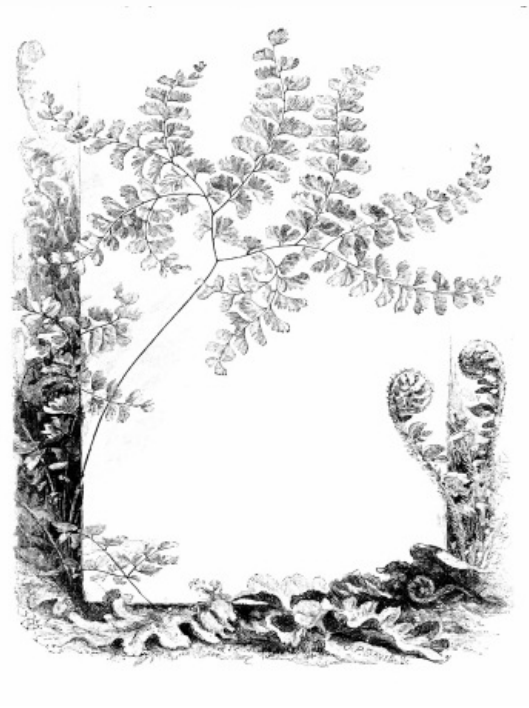
Down in the moist green swamp lot the yellow cowslips bloom along the shallow ditch, and the eager farmer's wife fills her basket with the succulent leaves she has been watching for so long; for they'll tell you in New England that "they ain't noth'n' like caowslips for a mess o' greens." Near by we see the frog pond, with lush growth of arrow leaves and pickerel weed, and flat blades of blue-flag just starting from the boggy earth. Half submerged upon a lily pad, close by the water's edge, an ugly toad sits watching for some winged morsel for that ample mouth of his.

Who could believe that so much poetic inspiration could emerge from such a mouth as that; for verily it is this miserable-looking toad that lifts his little voice in the dreamy, drowsy chorus of the twilight. All sorts of odium have been heaped upon the innocent toad; but he only returns good for evil. He is the farmer's faithful friend. He guards his garden by day, and lulls him to sleep by night. Yonder, near those withered cat-tails, we see the village boys among the calamus-beds, pulling up the long white roots tipped with pink and fringed with trickling rootlets. What visions of candied flag-root stimulate them in their zeal! I can almost see the tender, juicy leaf-bud screened beneath that smooth pink sheath, and its aromatic pungency is as fresh and real to me as this appetizing fragrance that comes to us from the green tufts of spearmint we crush beneath our feet at every step. Bevies of swallows all around us skim through the air, like feathered darts, in their twittering flight; and the restless starling, like a field-marshal, with his scarlet epaulets, keeps sharp lookout for the enemy, and "flutes his O-ka-lee" from the high alder-bush at the slightest approach upon his chosen ground. Yonder on the wooded slope the feathery shad-tree blooms, like a suspended cloud of drifting snow lingering among the gray twigs and branches; and chasing across the matted leaves beneath, a lively troop of youngsters, girls and boys, make the woods resound with their boisterous jubilee. A jolly band of fugitives fresh from the stormy week's captivity—spring buds bursting with life, with a pent-up store of spirits that finds escape in an effervescence of ringing laughs and in a din of incessant jabber. Well I know the buoyant exhilaration that impels them on in their reckless frolic, as they skip from stone to stone across the rippling stream, or "stump" each other on the treacherous crossing-pole which spans the deep still current! Now I see them huddle around the trickling grotto among the mossy bowlders in the steep gully yonder, where the mountain spring bubbles into a crystal pool. Alas! how quickly its faint blue border of hepaticas is rifled by the ruthless mob! Now they clamber up the great gray rocks beneath the drooping hemlocks, stopping in their headlong zeal to snatch some trembling cluster of anemone, nodding from its velvety bed of moss; now plunging down on hands and knees, shedding innocent blood among an unsuspecting colony of fragile bloom—those glowing blossoms so welcome in the early spring! Who does not know the bloodroot—that shy recluse hiding away among the mountain nooks, that emblem of chaste purity with its bridal ring of purest gold? Who has not seen its tender leaf-wrapped buds lifting the matted leaves, and spreading their galaxy of snowy stars along the woodland path?

Then there was the shy arbutus, too. Where in all the world's bouquet is there another such a darling of a flower? And where in all New England does that darling show so full and sweet a face as in its home upon that sunny slope I have in mind, and know so well? Was ever such a fragrant tufted carpet spread beneath a hesitating foot? Even now, along the lichen-dappled wall upon the summit, I see the lingering strip of snow, gritty and speckled, and at its very edge, hiding beneath the covering leaves, those modest little faces looking out at me—faces which seemed to blush a deeper pink at their rude discovery. No other flower can breathe the perfume of the arbutus, that earthy, spicy fragrance, which seems as though distilled from the very leaf-mould at its roots. Often on this sunny slope, so sheltered by dense pines and hemlocks, have these charming clusters, pink and white, burst into bloom beneath the snow in March; and even on a certain late February day, we discovered a little, solitary clump, fully spread, and fairly ruddy with the cold. Here, too, we found the earliest sprays of the slender maidenhair; that fairy frond and loveliest among ferns, with black and lustrous stems, and graceful spread of tender gauzy green.

AFTER ARBUTUS.

Where was the nook in all that hill-side woods that we left unsearched in our April ramblings? I recall the “tat,” “tat” upon the dry carpet of beech leaves, as the delicate anemone in my hand is dashed by a falling drop! Lost in eager occupation, we had not observed the shadow that had stolen through the forest; and now, as we look out through the trees, we see the steel-blue warning of the coming shower, and feel the first gust of the tell-tale breeze—how the willows wave and gleam against the deep gray clouds, so weirdly reflected in the gliding stream beneath, like an open seam to another sky! See the silvery flashes of that flock of pigeons circling against the lurid background. No, we cannot stop to see them, for the rain-drops begin to patter thick and fast. Away we scamper to the shelter of the overhanging rocks. The lowering sky rolls above us through the branches. The glassy surface of the brook takes on a leaden hue as the rain-cloud drags its misty veil across the distant meadows. The brown leaves jump and spatter at my feet, and the blue liverwort flowers on right and left duck their heads like little living things dodging the pelting rain-drops.

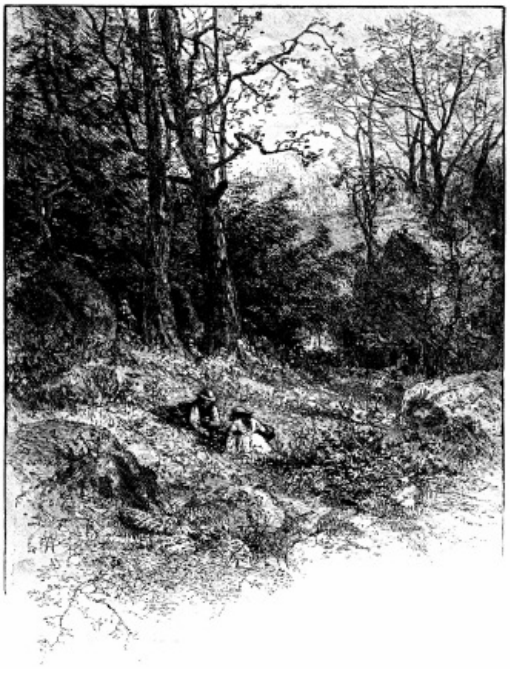


THE FAIRY FROND.

Oh, the lovely fickleness an April day! Even now the distant hill is lit up by the bursting sun. Nearer and nearer the gleam creeps across the landscape, chasing the shower away, and in a moment more the meadows glow with a freshened green, and the trees stand transfigured in glistening beads flashing in the sunbeams. The quickened earth gives forth its grateful incense, and even an enthusiastic frog down in the lily-pond sends up his little vote of thanks.

AN APRIL DAY.

April’s woods are teeming with all forms of life, if one will only look for them. On every side the ferns, curled up all winter in their dormant sleep, unroll their spiral sprays, and reach out for the welcome sun. The spicy colt’s-foot, or wild ginger, lifts its downy leaves among the mossy rocks and crevices, and its homely flower just peeps above the ground, and, with a lingering glance at the blushing *Rue anemone* close by, hangs its humble head, never to look up again. High above us the eccentric cottonwood-tree dangles its long speckled plumes, so silvery white. Now we hear a mellow drumming sound, as some unsuspecting grouse, concealed among the undergrowth near by, beats his resonant breast. Could we but get a glimpse of him, we would see him simulate the barn-yard gobbler, as with proud strut and spreading tail he disports himself upon some fallen log or mossy rock. Perhaps, too, that coy mate is near, admiring his show of gallantry, and holding a sly flirtation.



AMONG THE WILD FLOWERS.

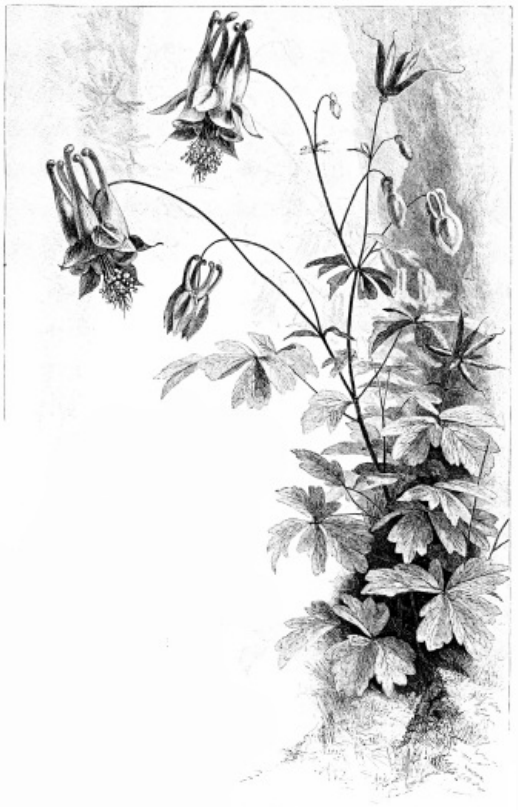
Look at this craggy precipice of rock, lost above among the green-tasselled evergreens, and trickling with crystal drops from every drooping sprig of moss. How its rugged surface is painted with the mottled lichens of every hue, here like a faint tinge of cool sage-green, and there in large brown blotches of rich color! See the fringe of ferns that bursts from the fissure across its surface. There the trillium hangs its three-cleft flower of rich maroon; and later we shall see the fern-like spray of Solomon’s-seal swinging its little row of straw-colored bells from the ledge above. Airy columbines, too, shall float their scarlet pendants on fragile stems, and with their graceful nod tell of the slightest breeze, when all else is still. What is that cinnamon-brown bird that hops along the stone wall yonder? Now he alights upon the tulip-tree, and swells his speckled breast in a series of short experiments—a broken song, in which every note or call has its twin echo. A “mocking-thrush” he is, indeed, for he mimics his own song from morn till night in all the thickets and pasture-lands. Take care there! why, you almost trod upon that feathery tuft of “Dutchman’s breeches.” Oh, who is he that dared to clothe this sweet blossom in such an ignominious title? Where is the Dutchman that ever wore unmentionables of such exquisite pink satin as that pale *dicentra* wears? No wonder their little broken hearts droop at the insult!

The grotesque Jack-in-the-pulpit, rising above that crumbling log, is named more to my mind. There he stands beneath his striped canopy, and preaches to me a sermon on the well-remembered rashness of my youth in trifling with that subterranean bulb from which he grows. But I ignored his warning in those early days. I only knew that a real nice boy across the way seemed very fond of those little Indian turnips, called them “sugar-roots,” and said that they were full of honey. And as he bit off his eager mouthful, and refused to let me taste, I sought one for myself, and, generous boy that he was, he showed me where to find the buried treasure. It was like a small turnip, an innocent-looking affair (and so was the nice boy’s modelled piece of apple, by-the-way). But oh! the sudden revelation of the red-hot reservoir of chain-lightning that crammed that innocent bulb! Even as I think of it, how I long once more to interview that real nice boy who opened up the mysteries of the “sugar-root” to my tempted curiosity. Let boys beware of this wild, red-hot coal; and should they be impelled by a desire to test the unknown flavor, let them solace themselves with a less dangerous mixture of four papers of cambric needles and a spoonful of pounded glass. This will give a faint suggestion of the racy pungency of the Indian turnip. Were some kind friend at the present day to seek to kill me off with poisoned food, I should forthwith have him arrested on a charge of

attempted murder, and incarcerated in the county jail. But what would be wilful homicide in the man is only a guileless proof of friendship in the boy, and his affections and their symptoms present a living paradox; and those boisterous days, with all their fond caresses in the way of fights and bruises and black eyes, and even Indian turnips, we all agree were full of fun the like of which we never shall see again.

MEADOW BROOK.

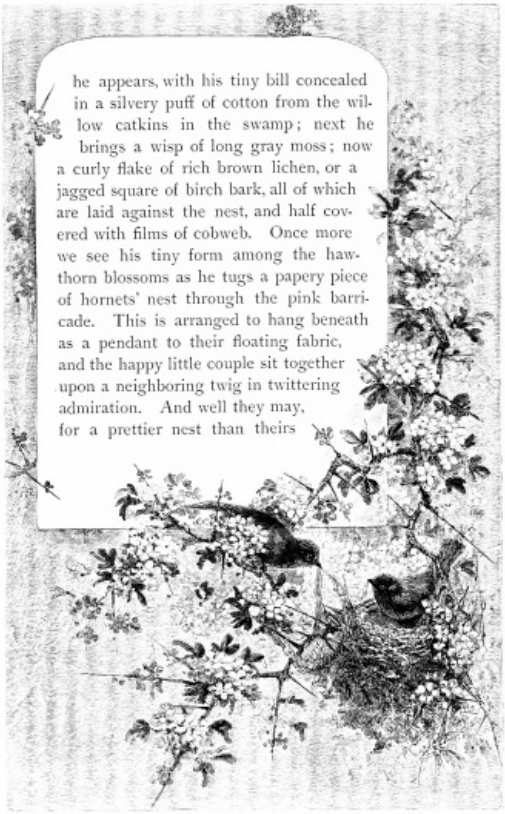
How well we remember those tramps along the meadow brook: the dark, still holes beneath the overhanging rocks, where, with golden slipping loop and pole and cautious creep, we wired those lazy, unsuspecting “suckers” on the gravelly bed below! Ah! what scientific angling with the rod and reel in later years has ever brought back the keen tingle of that primitive sport? The great green bull-frogs, too, in the lily-pond, disclosing their cavernous resources as they jumped and splashed and sprawled after the tantalizing bit of red flannel on that dangling hook! We recall that rickety bridge among the willows, and the mossy nest of mud so firmly fixed upon the beam beneath. How could we be so deaf to the pleading of those little phoebe-birds that fluttered so beseechingly about us? Then there was that deep hole in the sand-bank near the brook, where the burrowing kingfisher hid away his nest, where we watched in the twilight to see him enter, and, with big round stone in readiness, “plugged” him in his den! What fun it was to dig him out, and ventilate his musty nest of fish-bones! The starling in the thicket of the swamp circled through the air with angry “Quit! quit!” as we picked our way through the bristling bogs so close upon her nest. We’ll not forget that false step that sent us sprawling in the green slimy mud, at the first electrifying glimpse of those brown spotted eggs. The high-holer, too, whose golden gleam of wing upon the bare dead tree betrayed his nesting-place in the hollow limb—was ever such a stimulus offered to the eagerness of youth? Who would give a second thought to his tender shins at the prospect of such a prize as a nest of high-hole’s eggs? How round and white they were! how the pale golden yolk floated beneath the pearly shell! Those were jolly days for us; but the poor birds had to suffer, and few, indeed, were the nests that escaped our prying search. There was the cat-bird in the evergreens, with lovely eggs of peacock blue; the pure white treasures of the swallows in the mud nests under the barn-yard eaves; the sky-blue beauties of the robin; the brown speckled eggs in the sheltered nest of song-sparrows on the grassy slope; the dear little eggs of chippies in their horse-hair bed, and in their midst the insinuated specimen of the cheeky cow-blackbird: there were eggs of every shape and hue, and we knew too well where to put our hand on them.



THE COLUMBINE.

THE PHŒBE’S NEST.

In a flowering hawthorn outside our window we watched a loving pair building their pensile nest among the thorns and blossoms. How incessant was their solicitude for that fragile framework until its strength was fully assured against the tossing breeze! Tenderly and eagerly they helped each other in the disposition of those ravellings of string and strips of bark! he stopping every now and then to whisper sweetly to his mate, as she, with drooping, trembling wings, put up her little open bill to kiss. Yes, we often saw this little tender episode, as we watched them through the shutters of the half-closed blinds! Now he flies away; and the little spouse, thus left alone, jumps into the nest, and we see its mossy meshes swell as she fits the deep hollow to her feathery breast. Presently her consort returns, trailing along a gossamer of cobweb, which he throws around the supporting thorn, and leaves for her to spread and tuck among the crevices. Again



BUILDING THE NEST.

never hung upon a thorn. Not perfect yet, it seems, however, for that little feminine eye has seen the need of one more touch. Away she flies, and in a minute more a downy feather, tipped with iridescent green, is adjusted in the cobwebs.

IN THE APPLE ORCHARD.

This dainty little work of art is only one of the thousands that everywhere are building in the blooming trees and thickets. These are the supreme moments of the spring, consecrated to the loves of bird and blossom. Every little winged form that scarcely bends the twig has its all-consuming passion, and every tree its wedding of the flower. Out in the orchard the apple-trees are laden in veritable domes of pink-white bloom, as if by the rare spectacle of a rosy fall of snow, and from among the dewy petals the army of bees give forth their low, continuous drone—that sympathetic chord in the universal harmony of spring. How they revel in that rich harvest! Who knows what sweet messages are borne from flower to flower upon those filmy wings?

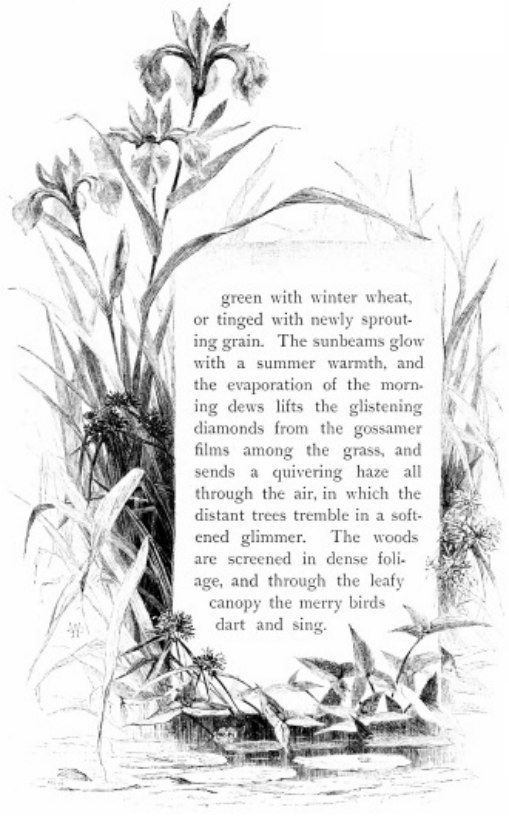
On the green slope beneath, the scattered dandelions gleam like drops of molten gold upon the velvety sward, and a lounging family group, intent upon that savory noonday relish, gather the basketfuls of the dainty plants for that appetizing “mess of greens.” Often, while thus engaged, have I stopped to watch the antics of the festive bumblebee, tumbling around in the tufted blossom—always an amusing sight. See how he rolls and wallows in the golden fringe, even standing on his head and kicking in his glee! Presently, with his long black nose thrust deep into the yellow puff, he stops to enjoy a quiet snooze in the luxurious bed—an endless sleep, for I generally took this chance to put him out of his misery, preferring, perhaps, to watch the robin hopping across the lawn. Now he stops, and seems to listen; runs a yard or so, and listens again, and without a sign of warning dips his head, and pulls upon

an unlucky angle-worm that much prefers to go the other way. It is a well-known fact that angle-worms approach the surface of their burrows at the sound of rain-drops on the earth above. I sometimes wonder if the robin in its quick running stroke of foot intends to simulate that sound, and thus decoy its prey.

I remember the wild tumult of a troop of boys upon the hill-side, tracking the swarming bees as they whirled along in a living tangle against the sky, now loosening in their dizzy meshes, now contracting in a murmuring hum around their queen, and finally settling on a branch in a pendent bunch about her. So tame and docile, too! seeming utterly to forget their fiery javelins as they hung in that brown filmy mass upon the bending bough! “A swarm of bees in May iz wuth a load o’ hay.” So said our neighbor, as with fresh clean hive he secured that prized equivalent. Here they are soon at home again, and we see their steady winged stream pouring out through the little door of their treasure-house, and the continual arrival of the little dusty plunderers, laden with their smuggled store of honey, and their saddle-bags replete with stolen gold. Down near the brook they find a land of plenty, literally flowing with honey, as the luxuriant drooping clusters of the locust-trees yield their brimful nectaries to the impetuous, murmuring swarm. But there is no lack now of flowery sweets for this buzzing colony. On every hand the meadow-sweets and milkweeds, the brambles, and the fragrant creeping-clover show their alluring colors in the universal burst of bloom, and not one escapes its tender pillaging.

Up in the woods the gray has turned to tender green. The flowering dog-wood has spread its layers of creamy blossoms, giving the signal for the planting of the corn, and in the furrowed field we see that dislocated “man of straw,” with old plug hat jammed down upon his face, with wooden backbone sticking through his neck-band, and dirty thatch for a shirt bosom—a mocking outrage on any crow’s sagacity. Those glittering strips of tin, too! Could you but interpret the low croaking of the leader of that sable gang in yonder tree, you might hear of the appalling effect of these precautions. I heard him once as I sat quietly beneath a forest tree, and in the light of later events I readily recalled his remarks upon the occasion: “Say, fellers! look at that old fool down there hanging out those tins to show us where his corn is planted. Haw! haw! I swaw! cawn! cawn! we’ll go down thaw and take a chaw!” And they did; and they perched upon that old plug hat, and looked around for something to get scared about. A single look at a crow shows that he has a long head, and it is not all mouth either.

Every day now makes a transformation in the landscape. The golden stars upon the lawn are nearly all burnt out: we see their downy ashes in the grass. Their virgin flame is quenched, and naught remains but those ethereal globes of smoke that rise up and float away with every breeze. Where is there in all nature’s marvels a more exquisite creation than this evanescent phœnix of the dandelion? Beautiful in life, it is even more beautiful in death. And now the high-grown grass is cloudy with its puffs, whose little fairy parachutes are sailing everywhere, over mountain-top and field. Here the corn has appeared in little waving plumes, and the horse and cultivator are seen breaking up the soil between the rows. Great snowy piles of cloud throw their gliding shadows across the patchwork of ploughed fields and meadows, fresh and



BLUE-FLAGS.

The chickadees are here, and scarlet tanagers gleam like living bits of fire among the tantalizing leaves. Pert little vireos hop inquisitively about you, and the bell note of the wood-thrush echoes from the hidden tree-top overhead. Perhaps, too, you may chance upon a downy brood of quail cuddling among the dry leaves; but, even though you should, you might pass them by unnoticed, except as a mildewed spot of fungus at the edge of a fallen log or tree-stump, perhaps. The loamy ground is shaded knee-deep with rank growth of wood plants. The mossy, speckled rock is set in a fringe of ferns. Palmate sprays of ginseng spread in mid-air a luxurious carpet of intermingled leaves, interspersed with yellow spikes of loosestrife and pale lilac blooms of crane’s-bill; and the poison-ivy, creeping like a snake around that marbled beech, has screened its hairy trunk beneath its three-cleft shiny leaves. The mountain-laurel, with its deep green foliage and showy clusters, peers above that rocky crag; and in the bog near by a thicket of wild azalea is crowned with a profusion of pink blossoms.

Out in the swamp meadow the tall clumps of boneset show their dull white crests, and the blue flowers of the flag, the mint, and pickerel weed deck the borders of the lily pond. The waddling geese let off their shrieking

calliopes as they sail out into the stream, or browse with nodding twitch along the grassy bank. Swarms of yellow butterflies disgrace their kind as they huddle around the greenish mud-holes, and we hear on every side the “z-zip, z-zip,” amidst the din of a thousand crickets and singing locusts among the reeds and rushes. The meadows roll and swell in billowy waves, bearing like a white-speckled foam upon their crests a sea of daisies, with here and there a floating patch of crimson clover, or a golden haze of butter-cups. Rising suddenly from the tall grass near by, the gushing brimful bobolink crowds a half-hour’s song into a brief pell-mell rapture, beating time in mid-air with his trembling wings, and alighting on the tall fence-rail to regain his breath. A coy meadow-lark shows his yellow-breast and crescent above the windrow yonder, and we hear the ringing beats of whetted scythes, and see the mowers cut their circling swath.

Mowing! Why, how is this? This surely is not Spring. But even thus the Springtime leads us into Summer. No eye can mark the soft transition, and ere we are aware the sweet fragrance of the new-mown hay breathes its perfumed whisper, “Behold, the Spring has fled!”

SUMMER.

"ALL out for Hometown." There is an epidemic of eagerness, a general bustle for satchels and bundles, and the car is soon almost without a passenger; and, indeed, it would really seem as though the whole train had landed its entire human burden upon this platform; for Hometown is a popular place, and every Saturday evening brings just such an exodus as this: Husbands and fathers who fly from the hot and crowded city for a Sunday of quiet and content with their families, who year after year have found a refuge of peace and comfort in this charming New England town. Where is it? Talk with almost any one familiar with the picturesque boroughs of the Housatonic, and your curiosity will be gratified, for this village will be among the first to be described.

From the platform of the car we step into the midst of a motley assemblage, rustic peasantry and fashionable aristocracy intermingled. Anxious and eager faces meet you at every turn. For a few minutes the air fairly rings with kisses, as children welcome fathers, and fathers children. Strange vehicles crowd the depot—vehicles of all sizes and descriptions, from the veritable "one-hoss shay" to the dainty basket-phaeton of fashion. One by one the merry loads depart, while I, a pilgrim to my old home, stand almost unrecognized by the familiar faces around me. Leaning up against the porch near by, stands a character which, once seen, could never be forgotten. His face is turned from me, but the old straw hat I recognize as the hat of ten years ago, with brim pulled down to a slope in front, and pushed up vertically behind, and the identical hole in the side with the long hair sticking through. Yes, there he stands—Amos Shoopegg. I step up to him and lay my hand upon his shoulder. With creditable skill he unwinds the twist of his intricate legs, and with an inquiring gaze turns his good-natured face toward me.

"Is it possible that you don't remember me, Shoop?"

With an expression of surprise he raises both his arms. "Wa'al, thar! I swaiou! I didn't cal'late on runnin' agin yeu. I was jes drivin' hum from taown-meetin', an' thought as haow I'd take a turn in, jest out o' cur'osity. Wa'al, naow, it's pesky good to see yeu agin arter sech a long spell. I didn't re*cog*nize ye at fust, but I swan when ye began a-talkin', that was enuf fer me. Hello! fetched yer woman 'long tew, hey? Haow air yeu, ma'am? hope ye'er perty tol'ble. Don't see but what yeu look's nateral's ever; but yer man here, I declar for't, he got the best on me at fust;" and after having thus delivered himself, he swallowed up our hands in his ample fists.

"Yes, Shoop, I thought I'd just run up to the old home for a few days."

"Wa'al, I swar! I'm tarnal glad to see ye, and that's a fact. Anybody cum up arter ye? No? Well, then, s'posin' ye jest highst into my team." So saying, he unhitched a corrugated shackle-jointed steed, and backed around his indescribable impromptu covered wagon—a sort of a hybrid between a "one-hoss shay" and a truck.

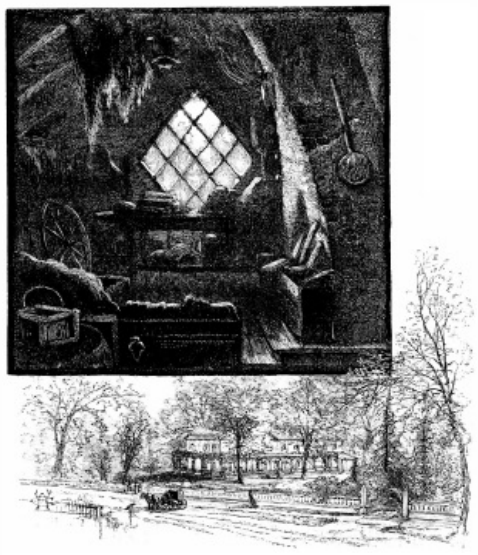
"'Tain't much of a kerridge fer city folks to ride in, that's a fact," he continued, "but I cal'late it's a little better'n shinnin' it." After some little manœuvring in the way of climbing over the front seat, we were soon wedged in the narrow compass, and, with an old horse-blanket over our knees, we went rattling down the hill toward the village and home of my boyhood.

Years have passed since those days when, as a united family, we dwelt under that old roof; but those who once were children are now men and women, with divided interests and individual homes. The old New England mansion is now a homestead only in name, known so only in recollections of the past and the possibilities of the future.

"Wa'al, thar's the old house," presently exclaimed Amos, as we neared the brow of a declivity looking down into the valley below. "Don't look quite so spruce as't did in the old times, but Warner's a good keerful tenant, 'tain't no use talkin'. I cal'late yeu might dig a pleggy long spell afore yeu could git another feller like him in this 'ere patch."

In the vale below, in its nest of old maples and elms, almost screened from view by the foliage, we look upon the familiar outlines of the old mansion, its diamond window in the gable peering through the branches at us. "Skedup!" cried Amos, as he urged his pet nag into a jog-trot down the hill, through the main street of the town. The long fence in front of the homestead is soon reached, a sharp turn into the drive, a "Whoa, January!" and we are extricated from the wagon.

“Wa’al, I’ll leave ye naow. I guess ye kin find yer way around,” said Shoop, as with one outlandish geometrical stride he lifted himself into the wagon. Cordially greeted by our hostess, with repeated urgings to “make ourselves at home,” we were shown to our room. The house, though clad in a new dress, still retained the same hospitable and cosy look as of old.

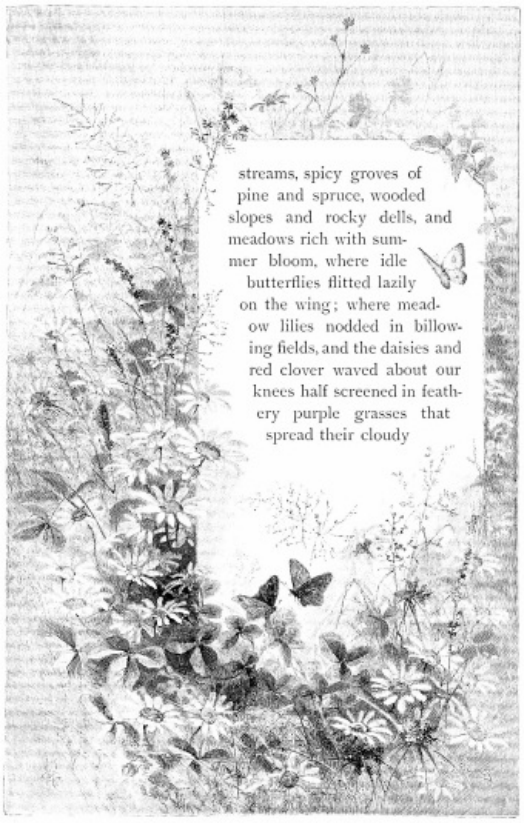


OLD HOMESTEAD AND GARRET.

Hometown, owing to some early local faction, is divided into two sections, forming two distinct towns. One, Newborough, a hill-top hamlet, with its picturesque long street, a hundred feet in width, and shaded with great weeping elms that almost meet overhead; and the other, Hometown proper, a picturesque little village in the valley, cuddling close around the foot of a precipitous bluff, known as Mount Pisgah. A mile’s distance separates the two centres. The old homestead is situated in the heart of Hometown, fronting on the main street. The house itself is a series of after-thoughts, wing after wing and gable after gable having clustered around the old nucleus, as the growth of new generations necessitated increased accommodation. Its outward aspect is rather modern, but the interior, with its broad open fireplaces, and accessaries in the shape of cranes and fire-dogs, is rich with all the features of typical New England; and the two gables of the main roof enclose the dearest old garret imaginable—at present an asylum for the quaint possessions of antique furniture and bric-à-brac, removed from their accustomed quarters on the advent of the new host. It is to this sanctuary that my footsteps first lead me, and, with a longing that will not be withstood, I find myself in front of the great white door. I lift the latch; a cool pungent odor of oak wood greets me as I ascend the steep stairs—an odor that awakens, like magic, a hundred fancies, and recalls a host of memories long forgotten. Every stair seems to creak a welcome, as when, on the rainy days of long ago, we sought the cosy refuge to hear the patter on the roof, or to nestle in the dark, obscure corners in our childish games. At the head of the stairs rises the ancient chimney, cleft in twain at the foot, with the quaint little cuddy between. Above me stretch the great beams of oak, like iron in their hardness. Yonder is the queer old diamond window looking out upon the village church, its panes half obscured by the dusty maze of webs. To the left, in a shadowy corner, stands the antiquated wheel—a relic of past generations. Long gray cobwebs festoon the rafters overhead, and the low buzzing of a wasp betrays its mud nest in the gable above. A sense of sadness steals over me as I sit gazing into this still chamber. On every side are mementos of a happy past, and all, though mute, speaking to me in a language whose power stirs the depths of my soul. Wherever the eye may turn, it meets with a silent greeting from an old friend, and the whole shrouded in a weird gloom that lends to the most common object an air of melancholy mystery. And yet it is only a garret. There are some, no doubt, for whom this word finds its fitting synonyme in the dictionary, but there are others to whom it sings a poem of infinite sweetness.

Looking through the dingy window between the maple boughs, my eye extends over lawn and shrubberies, three acres in extent—a little park, overrun with paths in every direction, through ancient orchard and embowered dells, while far beyond are glimpses of the wooded knolls, the winding brook, and meadows dotted with waving willows, and farther still the ample undulating farm.

It is in such a place as this that I have sought recreation and change of scene. My wife and I have run away from the city for a month or so. A vacation we call it; but to an artist such a thing is rarely known in its ordinary sense, and often, indeed, it means an increase of labor rather than a respite. My first week, however, I had consecrated to luxurious idleness. Together we wandered through the old familiar rambles where as boy and girl in earlier days we had been so oft together. Day after day found us in some new retreat. There were dark cool nooks by sheltered



AMONG THE GRASSES.

mist all through the blossoming maze. We heard the music of the scythe, and, sitting in the deep cool grass beneath the maple shade, we watched the circling motion of the mowers in the field—saw the forkfuls of the hay tossed in the drying sun, and breathed the perfumed air that floated from the windrows. We sauntered by the meadow brook where willows gleamed along the bank, and overhanging alders threw their sombre shadows in the quiet pools: where the ground-nut, and the meadow-rue, and the creeping madder fringed the tangled brink, and every footstep started up some agile frog that plunged into the unseen water. We stood where rippling shallows gurgled under festooned canopies of fox-grape, and the leaning linden-trees shut out the sky o'erhead and intertwined their drooping branches above the gliding current. Here, too, the weather-beaten crossing-pole makes its tottering span across the stream, and deep down beneath the bank the rainbow-tinted sunfish floats on filmy fins above his yellow bed of gravel, and we catch a flashing gleam of a silvery dace or shiner turning in the water.

Now we confront a rude slab fence, an ancient landmark, that terminates its length at the edge of the stream, where its gray and crumbling boards are secured with rusty nails against the trunk of a tall buttonwood-tree. A loosened slab is easily found, and we are soon upon the other side; and after picking our way through a forest of bush-elders, we emerge upon an open lot of low flat pasture-land, known always as the "old swamp meadow." No other five acres on the face of the earth are so dear to me as this neglected field. I know its every rise and fall of ground, its every bog, and its lush greenness is refreshing even to the thought.

It is a luxuriant garden of all manner of succulent and juicy vegetation; an outbursting extravagance of plant life of almost tropical exuberance. All New England's most majestic and ornamental flora seem congregated in its congenial soil; and even when a boy I learned to know and love them all, and even call them by their names.

Here are towering stems of iron-weed lifting high their scattered purple crowns, and in their midst the woolly clumps of boneset, its white flowered cushions intermingling with the dense pink tufts of thorough-wort.

On every side we overlook whole patches of these splendid blossoms, with their crests closely crowded in a mosaic of pink and white. And here's a bed of peppermint and spearmint, interspersed with flaming spikes of cardinal lobelia; and here a lusty plant of Indian mallow, entangled in a maze of gold-thread and smart-weed. Here are massive burdocks six feet high, and great trees of jimson-weed, with their large spiral flowers and thorny pods.

High fronds of chain-fern rise up on every side from a jungle of bur-marigolds and clotburs, and tear-thumbs, with their saw-toothed stems and tiny bunches of pink blossoms.

No inch of ground in the old swamp lot but which does its tenfold duty; and what it lacks in quality of produce it amply makes up in quantity. Even a neighboring bed of clean-washed gravel is overrun with creeping mallow, with its rounded leaves and little "cheeses" down among their shadows.

EVEN-TIDE.

Farther on we see the lily-pond, with its surrounding swamp and its legion of crowded water-plants. Here are rank, massive beds of swamp-cabbage, and lofty cat-tails by the thousand among the bristling bogs of tussock-sedge and bulrush. Here are calamus patches, and alder thickets, and sedges without number; and the prickly carex and blue-flag abound on every side. There are galingales and reeds, and tall and graceful rushes, turtle-head and jointed scouring grass, and horse-tail, besides a host of other old acquaintances, whose faces are familiar, but whose names I never knew. But they were all my friends in boyhood. I knew them in the bud and in the blossom, and even in their winter skeletons, brown and broken in the snow. Near by there is a ditch: you never would know it, for it is completely hidden from view beneath an interlacing growth of jewel-weed. But see that gorgeous mass of deep scarlet that floods the farther bank! Nowhere within a circuit of miles around is there such a regal display of cardinal flowers as this: skirting the borders of the ditch for rods and rods, clustering about a ruined, tumbling fence, whose moss-grown pickets are almost hidden in the dense profusion of bloom.

Then there is its airy companion, the “touch-me-not,” with its translucent, juicy stem, and its queer little golden flowers with spotted throats—the “jewel-weed” we used to call it. I know not why, unless from the magic of its leaf, which, when held beneath the water, was transformed to iridescent frosted silver. We all remember its sensitive, jumping seed-pods, that burst even at our approach for fear that we should touch them; but no one can fully appreciate the beauty of the plant who has not seen its silvery leaf beneath the water. Here it justifies its name, for it is indeed a jewel.

How often in those olden times have I lain down among these bulrushes and sedges near the lily pond, and listened to the buzzing songs of the crickets and the tiny katydids that swarmed the growth about me, and filled the air with their incessant din. I remember the little colony of ants that picked their way among the rushes; that gauzy dragon-fly too, that circled and dodged about the water’s edge, now skimming close upon the surface, now darting out of sight, or perhaps alighting on an overhanging sedge, as motionless as a mounted specimen, with wings aslant and fully spread. “Devil’s darning-needles” they were called. The devil may well be proud of them; for darning-needles of such precious metals and such exquisite design are rare indeed. They were of several sizes too. Some were large, and flashed the azure of the sapphire; others fluttered by with smoky, pearly wings, and slender bodies glittering in the light like animated emeralds: and another I well remember, a little airy thing, with a glistening sunbeam for a body, and wings of tiny rainbows.

I remember how I watched the disturbed motion of the arrow-heads out in the water, as the cautious turtles worked their way among them, and crawled out upon the stump close by.

Here they huddled together, a dozen or more, with heads erect, and turning from side to side as they surveyed the surrounding carpet of lily-pads, or listened to the bass-drum chorus of the great green bull-frogs among the pickerel-weed; and when I jumped and yelled at them, what a rolling, sprawling, splashing in the mud! It fairly makes me laugh to think of it. But there is hardly a leaf or wisp of grass in this old swamp lot but what brings back some old association or pleasant reminiscence.

For a week thus we idled, now on the mountain, now in the meadow, while I, with my sketch-book and collecting-box, either whiled away the hours with my pencil, or left the unfinished work to pursue the tantalizing butterfly, or search for unsuspecting caterpillars among the weeds and bushes.

SOME ART CONNOISSEURS.

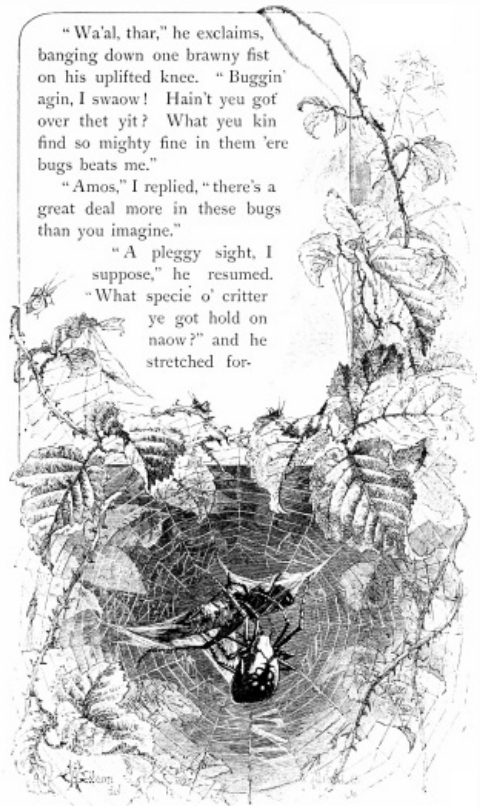
PROFESSOR WIGGLER.

On a sprig of black alder I found one—the same little fellow as of old, afflicted with the peculiarities of all his progenitors. We used to call him “Professor Wiggler,” owing to an hereditary nervous habit of wiggling his head from side to side when not otherwise employed. To this little humpbacked creature I am indebted for a great deal of past amusement. Distinctly I remember the whack-whack-whack on the inside of the old pasteboard box as the captive pets threatened to dash out their brains in their demonstrations at my approach. Professor Wiggler is really a most remarkable insect, as one might readily imagine from his scientific name, for in learned circles this individual is known as Mr. Gramatophora Trisignata. He has many strange eccentricities. At each moult of the skin he retains the shell of his former head on a long vertical filament. Two or three thus accumulate, and, as a consequence, in his maturer years he looks up to the head he wore when he was a youngster, and ponders on the flight of time and the hollowness of earthly things, or perhaps congratulates himself on the increased contents of his present shell. When fully grown, he stops eating, and goes into a new business. Selecting a suitable twig, he gnaws a cylindrical hole to its centre and follows the pith, now and then backing out of the tunnel, and dropping the excavated material in the form of little balls of sawdust. At length he emerges from the hollow, and again drawing himself in backward, spins a silken disk across the opening, and tints it with the color of the surrounding bark. Here he spends the winter, and comes out in a new spring suit in the following May. Only recently I had in my possession several of these twigs with their enclosed caterpillars, and in every one the color of the silken lid so closely matched the tint of the adjacent bark, although different in each, that several of my friends, even with the most careful scrutiny, failed to detect the deceptive spot. Whether the result of chance or of the instincts of the insect, I do not know; but certain it is that he paints with different colors under varying circumstances.

Insect-hunting had always been a passion with me. Large collections of moths and butterflies had many times accumulated under my hands, only to meet destruction through boyish inexperience; and even in childhood the love for the insect and the passion for the pencil strove hard for the ascendency, and were only reconciled by a combination which filled my sketch-book with studies of insect life.

There was one inhabitant of our fields which had always been to me a never-failing source of entertainment. There he is, the gilded tyrant. I see him now swinging to and fro on his glistening nest of silken threads, his golden yellow form glowing in bold relief against the dark recess in the brambles. My sketch is left in the grass, and I am soon seated in front of the gossamer maze. A festive grasshopper jumps up into my face, and makes a carom on the web. With a spasmodic snap of one hind leg he extricates it from its entanglement, and in another instant would fall from the meshes; but the agile spider is too quick for him. With a movement so swift as almost to elude the eye, he draws from his body a silver cloud of floss, and with his long hind legs throws it over his captive. The head and tail of the grasshopper are now further secured, after which the spider carefully straddles around the struggling insect, and bites off the other radiating webs in close proximity. The unlucky prey now hangs suspended across the opening. With business-like coolness his tormentor dangles himself from the edge of the torn web, and another cataract of glistening floss is thrown up and attached to the under side of the prisoner, after which he is turned round and round, as if on a spit. The stream of floss is carried from head to foot, and in less time than it takes to describe it the victim is wrapped in a silken winding-sheet, and soon meets his death from the poisoned fangs of his captor. Here is but one of the thousands of tragedies that are taking place every hour of the day in our fields. While deeply

interested in the closing scenes of this one, I suddenly become aware of a shadow passing over the bushes. I turn my head, and meet the puzzled and pleasant gaze of Amos Shoopegg, as he stands there, hands in pockets, and milk-pail swinging from his wrist.



THE TYRANT OF THE FIELDS.

ward his fringed and weather-beaten neck, and peered over the brambles. "What is't ye got thar—straddle-bug?" He came still nearer, and looked at the spider. "Wa'al, darn my pictur ef 'tain't an old yeller-belly! P'r'aps you don't know that them critters is pizen. Why, Eben Sanford's gal got all chawed up by one on 'em. Great Sneezer!" he exclaimed, taking three or four strides backward, with both hands uplifted. I had merely raised my hand and gently smoothed the spider.

"Wa'al," he continued, "yen kin rub 'em daown ef yeu pleze; but fer *my* part, I'd ruther keep off abaout a good spittin' distance"—which was the Shoopegg way of expressing a length of about fifteen feet. Amos was crossing lots for his "caow," he said; but in spite of his plea that the "old heiffer" was "bellerin'" like "Sam Hill," and was "gittin' 'tarnal on-easy," I made him tarry sufficiently long to enable me to send him off a wiser man.

Amos Shoopegg is a type of a large class of the native element of Hometown. Of course, "Shoopegg" is not his actual name. In the long line of his prided Puritan ancestry no one ever bore it before him. This is only an affectionate epithet given him by the village boys full twenty years ago, and it has stuck to him closer than a brother ever since, as those festive surnames always do. Nominally, Amos was a farmer. In summer he was one in fact, and could swing off as pretty a swath in haying as any man in town. But in the winter he changed his vocation, and became a disciple of the "waxed-end." All day long he could be seen, closeted with a little red-hot stove, plying his trade in his small, square shop, up near the old red school-house. Here he pounded on the big lapstone on his knees, or, with strap and foot-stick in position, punched and tugged around the edge of those marvellous brogans. He made slings and leather "suckers" for the boys, and furnished them with all the black-wax they could chew—or stow-away, to stick between the lining of their pockets. And the huge wooden shoe-pegs that he drove beneath his hammer were a sight to behold. The man who used his "cheap line of goods" might verily say he walked upon a wood-pile.

So they dubbed him "Shoe-peg," or "Shoop" for brevity. There are others among his neighbors who would furnish an inexhaustible source of study to the student of character. There's old Rufus Fairchild, known as "Roof," a rotund specimen of rural jollity, his round face set in dishevelled locks of gray, with a twinkle in his eye and a good word for everybody. And there's Father Tomlinson, who keeps the post-office down by the dam, as genial an old fellow as ever wrapped up his throat in a white stock. And I might almost continue the list indefinitely. But there is one I must especially mention; and, now that I think of it, he really should have headed the list, for he stands alone—or at least he does *sometimes*. If you are in search of the embodiment of typical Erin, you need go no farther; here he is. This individual represents another nationality which swells the population of Hometown—the hard-working laborers who toil in the great factory down in the glen, called "Satan's Misery." The above personage is one of the best-hearted creatures in the town; but it is the old story, and the world to him is enclosed in the compass of a barrel-hoop. When last I saw him he was in an evident decline, but as I put my finger on his wrist I could still feel the pulsations of the whiskey coursing through his veins.

"Look here, my good fellow," I said to him one day, "why don't you taper off a little? If you keep on in this way, you'll be in your grave in less than a month. How would you like that?"

"Arrah, begorra," he replied, with a look of hopeful resignation, "if I cud awnly be shure o' me gude skvare dthrink in the other wurrld, oi wudn't moind."

The record of a single evening spent in the village store, with its rural jargon and homespun yarns, its odd vernacular and rustic gossip, would make a volume as rare and unique as the characters it would depict.

The store itself is a matchless picture in its way, and for variety in accessory is as rich as could be wished for.

The low, murky ceiling, hung with all manner of earthly goods—scythes and rakes, boots and pails, in pendulous array; bottles and boxes, brooms and breast-pins, are here—in short, everything that heart could wish or thought suggest, from speckled calicoes to seven-cent sugar, or from a three-tined fork to a goose-yoke. Evening after evening, for an hour or so, I was tempted thither, until I found the week had gone. Sunday came again—Sunday in New England. The old bell swung on its wheel in the belfry, ringing out its call to devotion, and ere the echo had died in the recesses of the mountain beyond the still atmosphere reverberated with an answering peal from the little sister church in the valley below, as the scattered groups with strolling steps wend their way to “meeting,” and the gay loads from Newborough go flitting by on the accustomed Sunday drive.

Monday dawned on Hometown. It found me up and doing. I had enjoyed one week of glorious loafing, but work was the programme for the next. I went to Draper’s Inn and engaged a horse and buggy “until further notice.” “A spang-up team” he called it, and it would be up “in half a jiffy.” We were waiting for it when it came, and what with our variety of luggage in the shape of canvases, color-boxes, hammocks, camp-seats, and easels, every bit of available space in that buggy was well utilized. Before the clock has struck nine, we are spinning along down through the village, now past the store, now over the bridge, and turning to the right, we glide by the little post-office, as the kind face of Father Tomlinson nods a “good-bye” from the door-way.

A little farther, and we have left the little slope-roofed school-house in our path, and are soon ascending the long hill of Zoar, from which we look back four miles to the cliff and nestling town. In ten minutes more we approach the brow of a steep declivity, and the broad Housatonic opens up to view, winding off into the misty mountains in the distance. There is now a drive of half a mile along the side of a wild mountain-slope, where mountain-laurels grow in wild profusion, and the rooty, overhanging banks are tufted with rich green moss, overgrown with checker-berries and arbutus. The river roars far down below us, and for a few minutes our eyes feast on as lovely an extent of varied New England landscape as is easily found. And yet this is only a short section of one of the many matchless drives that follow the course of this beautiful river around the borders of Hometown.

FAMILIAR FACES AT THE VILLAGE STORE.

Suddenly we leave the stream as it glides away on an abrupt turn beneath the crescent of a rocky precipice, and before we have fairly lost the sound of the ripples we have arrived at our journey’s end. A pair of bars under an old butternut-tree mark the place. The carriage is backed to the side of the road, and the horse turned loose in the rocky meadow. This is Joab Nichols’s “pasture lot,” with fodder consisting principally of huge boulders, hardhack, and spleenwort; to be sure, with a stray relish of “butter-and-eggs” here and there, and a thousand white saucers of wild carrot handy to go with them. One or two trips across the field bring all our luggage, and we are soon enjoying cool comfort in the hemlock shade of a fairy grotto. Above us the babbling brook bounds and splashes over mossy rocks, disappearing in a mass of creamy foam, from under which it eddies toward us only to plunge twenty feet into a miniature cañon below. Again, yonder it bubbles into a whirling pool, where the bordering ferns bend and nod above its buoyant surface; and now gliding from view beneath the tangle of drooping boughs, it disappears only to burst forth once more in its merry song as it rushes over the rapids.

“I chatter, chatter as I go,
To join the brimming river;
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever.”

Here in this wild retreat I have found my sylvan studio—shut in by fringed and fragrant evergreens, enlivened by the undergrowth of feathery fronds, and the shimmer of the beech, as the tracery of overhanging boughs trembles in the gentle breeze. Day after day finds us in this little paradise, and as one in luxurious hammock swings away the hours, now lost in fiction, now in short repose, or perhaps with busy needle fashions graceful figures in Kensington design, the canvas on the easel shows a fortnight’s constant care, and the palette changes to a keepsake of a sunny memory—a tinted souvenir.

For two weeks the gurgling brook sang to us in this wild retreat. As evening after evening closed in upon us, the unfinished pictures were stowed away in horizontal crevices between the rocks, and, with hammock still swinging in the trees, we left the gloom to the hooting owl, that evening after evening, with tremulous cry, proclaimed the twilight hour from the tall hemlock overhead. Ere long the murmuring Housatonic shimmers below us in the moonlight as we hurry on our homeward way, and the distant lights of Hometown are soon seen glimmering; through the evening mist. The old bridge now rumbles through the darkness its signal of our return, and the host of Draper’s Inn is seen awaiting us at the illumined door-way. A quiet, cosy supper, and in the rays of a gleaming lantern, held aloft to light our path, we follow our lengthening shadows to the old front gate. Repeat this day’s record fourteen times, and you have the sum of a happy experience, with but one drawback: it had an end—an end that would have left its reaction, were it not for the store of increased pleasure that awaited us for the few closing days of our pilgrimage—for me, at least, although in other scenes, its climax.

A SOUVENIR.

Many like me are happy in the possession of a dear old homestead; but there are few, I ween, who enjoy the blessing of a double inheritance such as has been my lot—two homes which share my equal devotion, two homes without a choice; the one this beloved heirloom in Hometown, and the other—But you shall see. We shall be there soon, for the little satchel is packed, and the carriage awaits us at the gate. A drive of eighteen miles is before us—a beautiful series of pictures. Down through the village, past the old red mill and smithy, with its ringing anvil, and we are soon winding our way through a sombre glen. Presently we catch glimpses of the great rumbling factory, with its clouds of smoke and steam melting into the wooded mountain above. The old yellow bridge now creaks under our approach, and ere we are aware a sudden turn leads us out of a wilderness on to the shore of the beautiful Housatonic. For a few minutes the rushing water trickles through the wheels as over jolting stones our pony leads us through the ford, and, refreshed by the cool bath, makes a lively sally up the eastern bank. For ten miles the Housatonic guides us around its winding curves through a path of ever-changing beauty, now shut in by the dense, dark evergreens, and again emerging into a bower of silvery beeches, where the roadway is carpeted with mottled shadows, and the dappled trunks flicker with the softened glints of sunlight. Here we come upon a sandy stretch where the road is sunken between two sloping banks thick-set with mulleins and sweet-fern, and overrun with creeping brambles. The stone-wall above is wreathed in trailing woodbine, and along its crest we see the swaying tips of wheat from the edge of the field just beyond; and here we pass a border of whortleberry bushes, laden with their fruit. Now it is a hazel thicket crowding close upon our wheels, and among the leaves we see the brown, tanned husks of the ripening nuts, almost ready for that troop of boys and girls that you may be sure are watching and waiting for them.

The old gray toll-bridge soon nears to view, with its two long spans and fantastic beams. Farther on, peering from its willows, stands the ruined cider-mill, with its long moss-grown lever jutting through the trees—an old-time haunt, now crumbling in decay. But we only catch a glimpse of it, for in a moment more we are shut in beneath another bower of beeches and white birches, where the road takes a steep ascent, and the rippling river sends up its sunny reflections among the leaves and tree-trunks. When once more upon a level, it is to look ahead through a long avenue of shade—a leafy canopy two miles in length—with only an occasional break to open up some charming bit of landscape across the water. In these two miles of umbrage you may see types of almost every tree that grows within the boundaries of New England. Old veteran beeches are here, their trunks disfigured with scars that once were names cut in the bark. Here are spots that look like half obliterated figures; and here are spreading hieroglyphs that tell, perhaps, of old-time vows plighted at the trysting-tree; and here’s a semblance of a heart, a broken heart indeed, if its present form be taken as a prophetic symbol.

ALONG THE HOUSATONIC.

There are magnificent rock-maples too, and silver-maples that shake down their little swarms of winged seeds. Tulip-trees and spotted buttonwoods grow side by side, and quivering aspens and white poplars are seen at every clearing. There are yellow birch-trunks frayed out with the wind, and great snake-like stems of grape-vine, that twist and writhe among the branches of the trees. There are hop hornbeams, and chestnuts, and—But there is no need to enumerate them all. Just think of every New England tree you ever knew, and add a score besides, and you will form a slight idea of the varied verdure that hems in this charming Housatonic drive, with its rocky roadside embroidered in trickling moss and fumitory; and rose-flowered mountain-raspberry growing so close upon the road that your pony takes a wayward nip, and plucks its blossomed tip as he passes.

Now comes an open level, with wide, expansive views, where every turn upon the road brings its fresh surprise, as some new combination of hazy mountain landscape towers above the distant river bend; and the flitting cloud shadows lead their capricious, undulating chase across the wooded slopes. The roadsides here are full of everchanging beauties too, with their trimmings of ornamental sunflowers, their picturesque old fences, and their clumps of purple-berried poke-weed, with here and there a yellow patch of toad-flax, and aromatic tufts of tansy hugging close against the fence. Even that clambering screen of clematis that trails over the shrubbery yonder cannot hide the scattered tips of crimson that already have appeared among the sumach leaves.

There are a thousand things one meets upon a country ride or ramble which at the time are allowed to pass with but a glance. The eye is surfeited and the mind confused with the continual pageantry. But months afterward, in the reveries about our winter fires, they all come back to us, with the added charm of reminiscence; and whether it be a crystal spring among a bank of ferns, or a thistle-top with its fluttering butterfly and inevitable bumblebee rolling in the tufted blossom, or a squirrel running along a rail, or perhaps a rattling grasshopper hovering in mid-air above the dusty road—no matter what, they all are welcome memories at our fireside, and draw our hearts still closer to the loveliness of nature.

This Housatonic road is rich in just such pastoral pictures. Two hours on such a course soon pass, when our pony whinnies at the welcome sight of the old log water-trough beyond—a landmark old and green when I was yet a boy, still nestling in its rocky bed, shadowed by the drooping hemlocks, still lavish with its overflowing bounty.

This benefactor by the way-side marks a turning-point in our journey, as we leave the grandeur of the Housatonic to pursue our way by the nooks and dingles of the wild Shepaug—a bubbling tributary whose happy waters sing of a varied experience. Now placid through the blossoming fields, now plunging down the precipice to ripple through a verdant valley, where, hemmed in at every turn, it seeks its only liberty beneath the rumbling of the old mill-wheels; and at last, ere it loses its identity in the swelling tide, leaving a mischievous and tumultuous record as it pours through the rocky cañon, and with surging, whirling volume carves huge caverns and fantastic statues in its massive bed of stone. Even now through the dark forest beyond we can hear the muffled roar, and for nearly a league farther as we ascend the long hill it comes to us in fitful whispers wafted on the changing breeze. Reaching the summit of this incline, we find ourselves on a hill-top wide and far-reaching, on right and left losing itself in wooded wold, while in front the level road diminishes to a point, surmounted by blue hills in the distance. Two miles on a pastoral hill-top, where golden-rod and tall spiræas cluster along the lichen-covered walls, where orange-lilies gleam among the alders, with now and then a blazing group of butterfly-plant or a dusty clump of milk-weed. The air is laden with the nut-like odor of the everlasting flowers all around us. The buzzing drum of the harvest-fly vibrates from every tree, and we hear the tinkling bell and lowing of the cattle in some neighboring field. Farther on, we look down from the edge of the plateau through the length of Happy Valley, with its winding stream, its barns and busy mills, its sunny homes glinting through the summer haze. On the left the lofty shadowed cliff known as “Steep-rock” towers against the evening sky, and again we catch the murmuring whiffs of the rushing stream in its sweeping bend beneath the overhanging precipice. A sharp turn round a jutting hill-side, and I meet a prospect that quickens the heart and makes the eye grow dim. There beyond, three miles “as flies the laden bee,” I linger on the welcome sight, as on its hill-top fair two steeples side by side betray the hidden town, my second home.

How lightly did I appreciate the fortunate journey when, twenty summers ago, I followed this road for the first time, when a boy of ten years, on my way to an unknown village, I looked across the landscape to the little spires on that distant hill! Little did I dream of the six years of unmixed happiness and precious experience that awaited me in that little Judea! I only knew that I was sadly quitting a happy home on my way to “boarding-school”—a school called the Snuggery, taught by a Mr. Snug, in a little village named Snug Hamlet, about twenty miles from Hometown.

There are some experiences in the life of every one which, however truthful, cannot be told but to elicit the doubtful nod or the warning finger of incredulity. They were such experiences as these, however, that made up the sum of my early life in that happy refuge called in modern parlance a “boarding-school”—a name as empty, a word as weak and tame in its significance, as poverty itself; no doubt abundantly expressive in its ordinary application, but here it is a mockery and a satire. This is not a “boarding-school;” it is a *household*, whose memories moisten the eye and stir the soul; to which its scattered members through the fleeting years look back as to a neglected home, with father and mother dear, whom they long once more to meet as in the tenderness of boyhood days; a cherished remembrance which, like the “house upon a hill, cannot be hid,” but sends abroad its light unto many hearts who in those early days sought the loving shelter; a bright star in the horizon of the past, a glow that ne’er grows dim, but only kindles and brightens with the flood of years. Yes, yes; I know it sounds like a dash of sentiment, but words of mine are feeble and impotent indeed when sought for the expression of an attachment so fond, of a love so deep.

Fifteen years ago, with a parting full of sorrow, I rode away from Snug Hamlet yonder in the village stage—a day that brought a depression that lingered long, and lingers still. Glowing, sunset-tinted fields glide by unnoticed now, as, with eyes intent on the distant hill, I look back through the lapse of time. A mile has gone without my knowing it, when a joyous laugh awakens me from my day-dreams. Two boys approach us on the road ahead, and, what might seem very strange to you, one wears a wooden boot-jack strung around his neck and dangling on his breast; but he carries his burden lightly and cheerfully. As they near the carriage I draw the rein, and they both pause by the roadside.

“Well, boys,” I ask, “where do *you* hail from?”

“We’re from the Snuggery, sir.”

“I thought so,” said I, with a laugh, in which they both joined. “But what are you doing with that boot-jack?”

“Oh, you see,” said one, with a roguish smile, “Charlie and I were having a little tussle in the sitting-room, and he picked up Mr. Snug’s boot-jack in the corner and began to pummel me with it; and jest as we were having it the

worst, and were rollin' on the floor, Mr. Snug came in and caught us in the job, and now we're *payin'* for it."

"How so?" I inquired, well knowing what would be the response.

"Oh, you see, Mr. Snug held a diagnosis over our remains, and said he thought we were suffering, for the want of a little exercise, and ordered us on a trip to Judd's Bridge."

"And the boot-jack?"

"Oh, he said that Charlie might want to play with that some more on the way, and that he'd better fetch it along;" and with a mischievous snicker at his encumbered companion, he led him along the road in an hilarious race, while we enjoyed a hearty laugh at their expense.

And this a *punishment*! Yes, here is an introduction to one phase of a system of correction as unique as the matchless institution in which it had its birth—a system without a parallel in the annals of chastisement or school government, and which for thirty years has proved its wisdom in the household management of the Snuggery.

"To Judd's Bridge!" How natural the sound of those words! How many times have I myself been on that same pilgrimage of penance! The destination of these boys is a rickety but picturesque structure which spans the Shepaug five miles below Snug Hamlet. Through three decades it looks back to its host of acquaintances of those romping lads who, in the superfluity of exuberant spirits, made havoc and din in the household. The dose is administered with wise discrimination both as to the symptoms and the needs and strength of the patient. It always proves a sterling remedy, and sometimes, indeed, a sugar-coated one, as in the case of these two ruddy, rollicking examples.

Judd's Bridge is but one of a score of places which serve in the administration of Snuggery discipline. It is, however, the one most remote, and its ten-mile journey is reserved as an heroic dose for extraordinary cases, after other prescriptions have been tried without avail. Next on the list comes Moody Barn, with "open doors" every day in the week to its frequent callers. This old settler, gray and weather-beaten, marks a point one mile from the Snuggery, where the still waters of the Shepaug run slow and deep—the favorite "swimming-hole" of the Snuggery.

THE HAUNTED MILL.

And then there's Kirby Corners, a mere stroll of a few minutes round the square of a rock-bound pasture—just enough to give yourself time to think a bit and congratulate yourself on what you have escaped. All these, and several more, are vivid in my memory; friends, old and intimate. And here's another, right before us by the roadside. For several minutes through the tantalizing trees we have heard its rumbling wheel, its reiterating clank, and busy saw; and now, as its familiar outline looms up against the evening sky, the vision seems to darken, as on that night of

long ago, when through the shadowy mystery of the moonlit gloom I stole my way among the sheltering golden-rod; when the lofty flume, like a huge horned creature, seemed to stride athwart me in the darkness, and the fitful boyish fancy saw strange phantoms in the floating, melting mist. This ancient structure reposes in a verdant dell at the foot of Snug Hamlet Hill. A choice of two roads lies before us—one short and direct, the other a roundabout approach. A sudden impulse leads me into the latter. On right and left I see the same old rocks and trees. There stands the aged beech to whose gnarled and hollow trunk I traced the agile flying-squirrel, and with suffocating flame and smoke drove him from his hiding-place. Here between large rocks and stones the trout-stream runs its course, now pouring in small cataracts, now eddying into still, dark nooks, where in those by-gone times I dropped the line of expectancy, but showed the clumsiness of adversity. A few minutes later, and we are gliding again by the dark Shepaug, now flowing calm and silent beneath a rugged bank, wild and umbrageous, where the swarm of katydids, with grating discord, maintain their old dispute, that never-ending feud. The wheels turn noiselessly in the shifting sand as we pursue our way. The low gray fog steals lightly over the lily-pads, floating into seclusion beneath the sheltering boughs, or, like an evanescent spirit, borne upon the evening breath, is lifted from the gloom, and slowly melts into the twilight sky. The solitary whippoorwill from his mysterious haunt, perhaps in yonder tree, perhaps in the mountain loneliness beyond, proclaims with dismal cry his oft-repeated wail. And as we ascend the darkening path, through the still night air, in measured cadence long and sad, we hear the toll of the distant knell. Threescore-and-ten its numbers tell of the earthly years—a curfew requiem for the dead. Even as we pass the little chapel at the summit of the hill, and the bell has scarcely ceased its melancholy tidings, we hear the shouts and merry laughs of the boys on the village green. Presently its broad expanse, shut in by twinkling windows and massive trees, spreads out before us, as a clear and ringing voice, like that of old, echoes through the growing darkness, “One hundred! Nothing said, coming ahead!” and a dim figure steals cautiously from the steps of the old white church to seek in the sequestered hiding-places. With a heart that fairly thumps, I urge my pony onward across the green, and ere he slackens his pace I am at my journey’s end. The dear old Snuggery, with its gables manifold and quaint, its fantastic wings and towers, stands there before me, the glowing windows beaming through the maples. Leaving our pony in willing hands, we enter the gate, and are soon upon the wide porch.

PURSUERS AND PURSUED.

It is eight o’clock, and the Snuggery is hushed in the quiet of the study hour, and as we look through the windows we see the little groups of studious lads bending over their books. Turning a corner on the piazza, we are confronted with a tall hexagonal structure at its farther end. This is the Tower, the lower room of which is consecrated to the cosy retirement of Mr. and Mrs. Snug. The door leading to the porch is open, and, as if awakening from a nap in which the past fifteen years have been a dream, I listen to the same dear voice. I approach nearer. Under the glow of a student’s lamp I look upon the beloved face, the flowing hair and beard now silvered with the lapse of years—a face of unusual firmness, but whose every line marks the expression of a tender, loving nature, and of a large and noble heart. Near him another sits—a helpmeet kind and true, cherished companion in a happy, useful life. Into her lap a nestling lad has climbed; and as she strokes the curly head and looks into the chubby face, I see the same expression as of old, the same motherly tenderness and love beaming from the large gray eyes.

Mr. Snug is leaning back in his easy-chair, and two boys are standing up before him; one of them is speaking, evidently in answer to a question.

“I called him a galoot, sir.”

“You called George a galoot, and then he threw the base-ball club at you—is that it?”

“Yes, sir,” interrupted George; “but I was only playing, sir.”

“Yes,” resumed the voice of Mr. Snug, “but that club went with considerable force, and landed over the fence, and made havoc in Deacon Farish’s onion-bed; and that reminds me that the deacon’s onion-bed is overrun with weeds. Now, Willie,” continued Mr. Snug, after a moment’s hesitation, with eyes closed, and head thrown back against the chair, “Saturday morning—to-morrow, that is—directly after breakfast, you go out into the grove and call names to the big rock for half an hour. Don’t stop to take breath; and don’t call the same name twice. Your vocabulary will easily stand the drain. You understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And, George,” continued Mr. Snug, with deliberate, easy intonation, “to-morrow morning, at the same time,

you present yourself politely to Deacon Farish, tell him that I sent you, and ask him to escort you to his onion-bed. After which you will go carefully to work and pull out all the weeds. You understand, sir?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then you will both report to me as usual." And with a pleasant smile, which was reflected in both their faces, the erring youngsters were dismissed. Before the door has closed behind them we are standing in the doorway. Here I draw the curtain; for who but one of its own household could understand a welcome at the Snuggery?

Those of my old school-mates who read this meagre sketch will know the happiness of such a meeting; but others less fortunate in the recollections of school-life can only look for its counterpart in an affectionate welcome in their own homes, for the Snuggery *is* a home to all who ever dwelt within its gates. Seated in the familiar cosiness, and surrounded by the friends of my school-days, the hours fly fast and pleasantly. There is plenty to talk about. Here is a village full of good people of whom I wish to learn, and there are many far-off chums of whom I carry tidings. A bell rings in the cupola as one by one, from the buzz in the outer rooms, boys large and small seek our seclusion for the accustomed good-night adieu; and ere another hour has passed forty sleepy urchins are packed away in their snug quarters. The evening runs on into midnight, as with stories of the past, its pains and penalties, its remembrances, now humorous now sad by turns, we recall the good old times; and the "wee sma' hours" are already upon us as we reluctantly retire from the goodly company to our rooms across the way.

The next morning finds us in the midst of a merry load, with Mr. Snug as a driver; and many and varied were the beauties that opened up before us on that charming ride! Snug Hamlet, once called Judea, in the qualities of its landscape as well as in everything else, is unique. Stripped of all its old associations, it presents to the artistic eye a combination of attractions scarcely to be equalled in the boundaries of New England. Situated itself on the brow of an abrupt hill, where its picturesque homes cluster about a broad open green, a few minutes' drive in any direction reveals a surrounding panorama of the rarest loveliness. Five hundred feet below us, winding in and out, now beneath leafy tangles, now under quaint little bridges, and again reposing placidly in broad mill-ponds, the happy Shepaug lends to a lovely valley its usefulness and beauty. Turning in another direction, we pass the Snuggery ball-ground, animated with the shouts of victory; and descending into a vale of almost primeval wildness, we continue our way up the ascent of "Artist's Hill," from whose summit on every side, as far as the eye can reach, the landscape softens into the hazy horizon. Returning, we pass through a ruined waste, where, three months before, the fierce tornado swooped down in its fiendish fury. On every side we see its awful evidences. Huge oaks, like brittle pipe-stems, snapped from their moorings; sturdy hickories, mere play-things in the gale, twisted into shreds.

TOLLING FOR THE DEAD.

WRECKS OF THE TORNADO.

Every morning saw me on some new drive, either with a wagon full of merry company, or as alone with Mr. Snug we held our quiet *tête-à-tête* on wheels, living over the olden times. In the afternoon I strolled by myself through the old and eloquent scenes. A volume could not hold the memories they revived—no, not even those of yonder barn alone. Even as I sit making my pencil-sketch, its reminiscences seem to float across the vision. Distinctly it recalls the events of one evening years ago. It was at about the sunset hour one Friday. I was quietly sitting on a lounge in the parlor talking to Cuthbert Harding, who was standing in front of me. Presently the door opens, and the tall figure of Dick Shin enters. Dick and I were antipodes in every sense of the word. Physically we were as a match and a billiard ball, he being the lucifer. He was also my *bête noire*, and he never missed an opportunity to vent his spite. Accordingly he stalked toward us, and with a violent push sent Cuthbert pell-mell on to me. In falling, he stepped heavily on my foot, and hurt me severely, which accounted for my excited expression as I threw him from me.

Of course Mr. Snug had to come in just at this time, and seeing us in what looked to him very like a fight, he took us firmly by the ears and stood us side by side, while I ventured to explain.

"Not a word!" exclaimed he, in a tone there was no mistaking. "You two boys may cool off on a trip to Moody Barn, after which you will report to me in the Tower. Now go."

Whatever may have been the state of my mind a few moments before, I was now mad in earnest, and with every bit of my latent obstinacy aroused, I sauntered out on to the porch.

"Cool off, old boy," whispered a grating voice at my side, as I turned and met the gaze of Dick Shin, motioning with his thumb in the direction of Moody Barn—"cool off; you need it;" and his ample mouth stretched into a sneering grin.

I had already formed an intention, but now it was a resolve.

"Cuthbert," said I to my quiet and less choleric companion, when some distance down the road, "I am not going on that trip."

"Not going!" replied he, with surprise; "why, you'll *have* to go."

"But I *won't* go, and that settles it. It's confounded unjust that we're sent, anyhow, and I don't propose to stand it."

"I think so too," answered Cuthbert, with hesitating emphasis; "but what'll we do? We'll have to report to Mr. Snug, you know; that's the *worst* of it."

"Well, I'll be spokesman, and I'll *lie* before I'll go on that trip."

I was boiling over with righteous wrath, but Cuthbert never was known to boil; he only simmered a little, but readily seconded my plan. We stopped at Kirby Corners, and there, secluded from view in the bushes, we spent the

interval. Cuthbert had a watch, and by the light of the rising moon we were enabled to fix the full period for the trip. One hour and a half we allowed—an abundant limit. During this time I had completely “cooled off,” and had schooled myself to that point where I could tell a lie with a smooth face and a clear conscience. Accordingly, when the time came, we appeared at the door of the Tower. Mr. Snug was sitting in his accustomed place, and we entered and stood before him.

PASSING THOUGHTS.

“Well, sir,” said he, with a polite bow of the head, dropping his paper and looking up at us.

“Mr. Snug, we have come to report,” said I, fearlessly. “We have been to Moody Barn.”

Instantly Mr. Snug straightened himself up in his chair, pushed back the gray locks from his high forehead, and, with an expression that I never shall forget, glared at me from under the frowning eyebrows.

“*You lie, sir!*” he exclaimed, in thundering tones that fairly made my hair stand on end, while Cuthbert trembled from head to foot; then followed a brief moment of consternation that seemed an age. “Now go!” continued he, as with an emphatic nod of the head he motioned toward the door. Sheepish and crest-fallen, we slunk away from the room. It is needless to say that we went this time. Through the darkness, by the aid of a lantern, we picked our way, as with theories numerous and ingenious we strove to account for that vociferous reception.

Late that night we held an experience meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Snug in the Tower, and if I remember right there were a few tears that fell, and many apologies and good resolves, and as the true state of the case dawned on Mr. Snug there was an evident twinge of regret on his kind face.

On the following morning (Saturday) there was a jolly party of youths leaving the Snuggery for a day’s boating at the lake. Dick Shin was among them; and just as he was passing out the gate, a youngster approaches him and taps him on the shoulder. “You are hereby arrested, sir, on the orders of Mr. Snug.”

With an anxious and innocent expression Dick follows his juvenile constable into the Tower, and his companions stroll along after to ascertain the cause of the detention. We pass over the brief but amusing trial, in which the prisoner, with the innocence of a little lamb, pleaded his cause.

“You *stumbled*, did you?” said Mr. Snug. “Well, you ought to know, sir, by this time that I don’t allow young men to stumble in that way in my house. These two boys have suffered through your admitted clumsiness.” Here Mr. Snug paused in a moment’s thought. “Dick Shin,” he continued, “I sent these innocent young gentlemen on two trips to Moody Barn—that makes four miles for Bigson and four miles for Harding, together making eight that they walked on your account. Now you may put down your fishing-pole, and ‘stumble’ along on the road to Judd’s Bridge, which will give you two extra miles in which to think over your sins. And to make sure”—here Mr. Snug arose and went to the closet—“you may take this hatchet along with you, and bring me back a good big chip from the end of the long bridge beam. I shall ride over that way to-morrow and see whether it fits. You understand?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the injured voice of Dick Shin. “But, Mr. Snug, can’t I put off that penance until Monday?”

“No, sir,” replied Mr. Snug, with a beaming smile and a bow of the head. “This is a lovely morning for contrite meditation. Go—*instantly*.”

Two hours later saw a demonstrative individual threatening to chop down the whole side of a bridge, while ten miles to the northward the placid surface of Waramaug rippled to the oars, and the lofty mountain-sides echoed with the shouts of a merry holiday.

But all things must have an end. The school-days ended, and so did this memorable vacation. A letter breaks the charm: insatiate publisher! Once more through the winding paths of the Housatonic, and I leave the loveliness of Hometown for the metropolis of brick and stone, there to resume the old routine.

AUTUMN.

I AM sitting alone upon a wooded knoll at our old farm at Hometown. Above me a venerable oak holds aloft its dome of bronze-green verdure, and on either side the gnarled and knotty branches bend low, and trail their rustling leaves among the tufts of waving grass that fringe the slope around me.

It is a spot endeared to me from earliest memory, a loved retreat whose every glimpse beneath the overhanging boughs has left its impress, whose every feature of undulating field, of wooded mountain, and winding meadow-

brook I have long been able to summon up at will before my closed eyes, as though a mirror of the living picture now before me. And what is this picture?

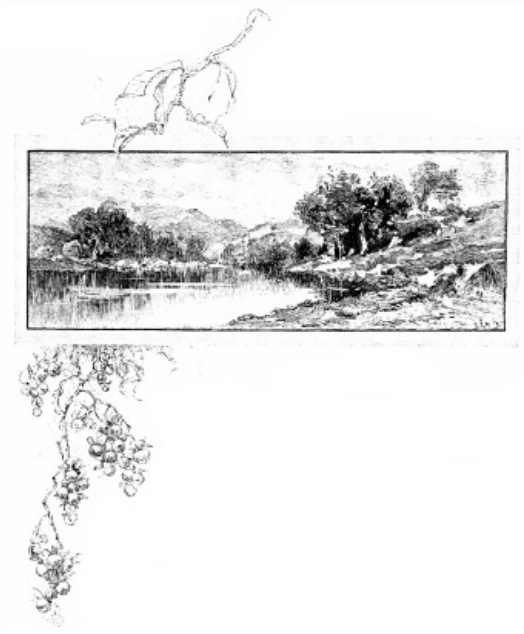
It is an enchanted vision of nature's autumn loveliness—a vision of peace and tranquil resignation that lingers like a poem in the memory. It is a glorious October day, one of those rarest and loveliest of days when all nature seems transfigured, when a golden, misty veil swings from the heavens in a charmed haze, through which the commonest and most prosaic thing seems spiritualized and glorified. The summer's full fruition is past and gone, the dross has been consumed; and in the lingering life, whose yielding flush now lends its sweet expression to the declining year, we see the type of perfect trust and hope that finds a fitting emblem in the dim horizon, where heaven and earth are wedded in a golden haze, where purple hills melt softly in the sky. It is a day when one may dream with open eyes, and whose day-dreams haunt the memory as sweet realities. The sky is filled with rolling, fleecy clouds, whose flat receding bases seem to float upon a transparent amber sea, from whose depths I look through into the blue air beyond.

Below me an ancient orchard skirts the borders of the knoll. Its boughs are crimson studded, and the ground beneath is strewn with the bright red fruit. They mark the minutes as they fall, running the gauntlet of the craggy twigs and bounding upon the slope beneath. Beyond the orchard stretch the low, flat meadow lands, set with alders and swamp-maples, with swaying willows, now enclosing, now revealing the graceful curves of the quiet stream as it winds in and out among the overhanging foliage. Soon it is lost beneath a wooded hill, where an old square tower and factory-bell betray the hiding-place of the glassy pond that sends its splashing water-fall across the rocks beneath the old town bridge. Looking down upon this bridge, Mount Pisgah, with its rugged cliff, is seen rising bold and stern against the sky, above a broad and bright mosaic of elms and maples, spreading from the grove of oaks near by in an unbroken expanse, to the very foot of the precipice, with here and there a sunny cupola or gable peering out among the branches, or a snowy steeple lifting high its golden cross or weather-vane glittering in the sun. The mountain-side is lit up with its autumn glow of intermingled maples, oaks, and beeches, with its changeless ledges of jutting rock, and dense, defiant pines standing like veteran bearded sentinels in perpetual vigilance.

All this comes to me in a single glimpse beneath the branches. But there are others, where undulating meadows, with their flowing lines of walls and fences, lead the eye through soft gradations to distant purple hills, through thrifty farms, with barns and barracks and rowen fields with browsing cattle, and ruddy buckwheat patches, where the flocks of village pigeons congregate among the cradle marks, in quest of scattered kernels shaken from the sheaves.

There is a tiny lake near by that nestles among the hill-side farms, where sloping pastures and fields of yellow, rustling corn glide almost to the water's edge. So sensitive and sympathetic is this little sheet of water that I christened it one day Chameleon Lake, for it wears a different expression for every phase of season or freak of weather, and always dwells in harmony with the landscape which encloses it. In cloudy days it frowns as cold as steel. In days of sunshine it is as bright and blue as the sky itself, or shimmers like a shield of burnished silver. And now it is a flood of autumn gold, carrying from shore to shore a maze of ripples laden with opaline reflections of intermingled glints from cloud and sky, and of the gold and ruby colored foliage along its banks.

But this knoll and all these farms are not mine alone. They are such as I should hope might lurk in the memory of almost any one who looks back to early days among New England hills.



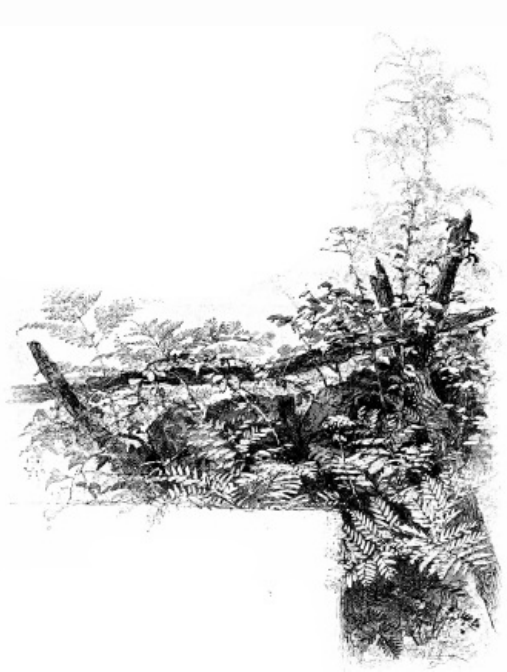
AN OCTOBER DAY.

This old oak-tree, whose furrowed bark I lean upon, was a hardy patriarch when first I sought its shade. Its added years have scarcely changed a feature or modified a line in its old-time noble expression. As I look up, its great open arms spread out against the sky exactly as they did when I lolled beneath their shelter and watched the drifting clouds of twenty years ago sail through them in the blue above. Even the jagged furrows in the bark I seem to recognize. Here, too, is that same spreading scale of greenish lichen that fain will grow upon the trunk, as if I had not often picked it all to pieces in my early idling. The same round oak-gall rests on the bed of leaves in the hollow between the rocks near by, as though it had forgotten how a dozen years ago I cracked its polished shell and sent its spongy contents to the winds.

And here comes that veritable ant creeping through the grass at my elbow—now on the root, now on the bark, exploring every crack and crevice in his hurried search. I wonder if the little fellow will ever find what he has been

looking for so long. And here's a friend of his coming down. They stop and wag their antennæ in a moment's conversation. I wonder what they said. I always *did* wonder when I watched them do the same thing on this very spot a score of years ago. The soft waving grass whispers about my ears as it did then, and I hear the low trumpet of the nuthatch as he creeps about in the tree o'erhead. Easily may one forget the lapse of time in such a place as this, where every leaf, and twig, and blade of grass conspire to breed forgetfulness of later years. Hark! that shrill tattoo again! The tree-toad. Yes, that same recluse in his mysterious hiding-place, seeking by his tantalizing trill to renew that game of hide-and-seek we left off so long ago—in those eager days when every stick and stone upon the knoll was overturned in my zeal to find his whereabouts. There he goes again! louder and more shrill. But now I realize the effect of time, for I only sit and listen to his oft-repeated call. Formerly that sound was like a galvanic thrill that electrified every nerve and muscle in my physiology. No, I'll not hunt for you again, my musical young friend; besides, the odds would be against you now, for I know more about tree-toads than I once did, and you wouldn't see me hunting on the ground as in the olden days. Besides, you're getting bold; there is no need of hunting, for in that last toot you gave yourself away. Even now my eyes are fixed upon the hole in yonder hollow limb, and I see your tiny form clinging to the rotten wood within the opening. What *would* I not have given *once* to have thought of that soggy hole!

Near by a spreading yew monopolizes a rocky bit of ground, its foliage creeping above a silvery gray bed of branching moss, whose pillowy tufts spread almost to my feet. This was my fairy forest of tiny trees. Here I found the fairies' cups and torches, and even now I can see their scarlet tips scattered here and there among the gray; and fragile little parasols, too—it were an insult, indeed, to designate such dainty things as these by the name of toadstools. Beyond this bed of moss a scrubby growth of whortleberry takes possession of the ground. The bushes are now bare of fruit, but ruddy with their autumn blushes, tingeing the surface of the knoll with a delicate coral pink. This thicket extends far down upon the slope, even encroaching upon the wheel-ruts of the lane, and across again, until cut short by an ancient tumbling line of lichen-covered stones, a landmark which has long since yielded up its claim as a barrier of protection to the old orchard it encloses, now only a moss-grown pile, with every chink and crevice a nestling-place of some searching tendril, fern, or clambering vine. For rods and rods it creeps along beneath the laden apple-trees, skirting the borders of this old farm lane, and finally hides away among a clump of cedars a few hundred feet away.



A WAY-SIDE PASTORAL.

Of all the picturesque in nature, what is there, after all, that so wins one's deeper sympathies as the ever-changing pictures of a rustic lane or roadside, with its weather-beaten walls and fences, and their rambling growth of weeds and creeping vines? How sweet the sense of near companionship awakened by these charming way-side pastorals that accompany you in your saunterings, and reach out to touch you as you pass—a sense of friendly fellowship that breathes a silent greeting in the most deserted paths or loneliest of by-ways!

Show me a ruined wall or a rutted zigzag fence, and I will show you a string of pearls, or rather, if in these later months, a fringe of gems, for the autumn fence is set in wreaths of rubies and glowing sapphires. Follow its rambling course, now through the field, now skirting swampy fallows, now by rustic lanes and cornfields and over rocky pastures, and you will follow a lead that will take you through the rarest bits of nature's autumn landscape.

Even in this lane, at the foot of the knoll below us, see the brilliant luxuriance of clustered bitter-sweet draping the side of that clump of cedars! It is only an indication of the beauty that envelops this lane for a full half mile beyond. Every angle of its rude rail fence encloses a lovely pastoral, each a surprise and a contrast to its neighbor.

Right here before us, what a beginning! Hold up your hands on either side, and shut out the surroundings. Such is the glimpse I always long to paint from nature, and yet how almost maddening is the result! Rather would I drink it all in and fix its every feature in my mind, and paint it from its memory, when the presence of the living thing before me shall not mock my efforts and put to shame the crude creations of oil and pigment.

See how the cool gray rails are relieved against that rich dark background of dense olive juniper, how they hide among the prickly foliage! Look at that low-hanging branch which so exquisitely conceals the lowest rail as it emerges from its other side, and spreads out among the creeping briers that wreathe the ground with their shining leaves of crimson and deep bronze! Could any art more daringly concentrate a rhapsody of color than nature has here done in bringing up that gorgeous spray of scarlet sumach, whose fern-like pinnate leaves are so richly massed against that background of dark evergreens? And even in that single branch see the wondrous gradation of color, from purest green to purplish olive, and olive melting into crimson, and then to scarlet, and through orange into yellow, and all sustaining in its midst the clustered cone of berries of rich maroon! Verily, it were almost an affront to sit down before such a shrine and attempt to match it in material pigment. A passing sketch, perhaps, that shall serve to aid the memory in the retirement of the studio, but a careful copy, *never!* until we can have a tenfold lease of life, and paint with sunbeams. But there is more still in this tantalizing ideal, for a luxuriant wild grape-vine, that shuts in the fence near by, sends toward us an adventurous branch that climbs the upright rail, and festoons itself from fence to tree, and hangs its luminous canopy over the crest of the yielding juniper. Even from where we stand we can see the pendant clusters of tiny grapes clearly shadowed against the translucent golden screen. Add to all this the charm of life and motion, with trembling leaves and branches bending in the breeze, with here and there a flitting shadow playing across the half hidden rails, and where can you find another such picture, its counterpart in beauty—where? perhaps its very neighbor, for all roadside pictures are "hung upon the line," they are all by the same great Master, and it is often difficult to choose.

Here we have a contrast. A dappled rock has taken possession of this little corner, or the corner has been built around it, if you choose—a "gray" rock we would call it in common parlance, but it is a gray composed of a checkered multitude of tints, colors which upon a rock, it would seem, were hardly worth an appreciative glance; but

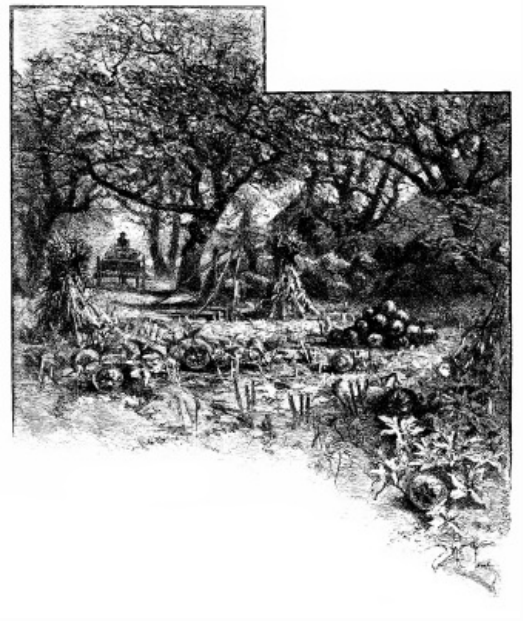
only let them be exhibited upon a fold of Lyons silk or Jouvin kid glove, and dignify them by the compliments of “ashes of roses,” or “London smoke,” and how eagerly they are sought, how exquisite they become. I speak in moderation when I say that I have often sat and counted as many as thirty just such tints upon the surface of a small “gray” rock, each *distinct*, and all so *refined* and exquisite in shade. This rounded bowlder is no exception; and with its tufted spots of jetty moss, and outcroppings of glistening quartz, its rounded, spreading blots of greenish lichens, and mottled groundwork, it may well defy the craft of the most skilled palette. And when these grays are contrasted with tender yellow greens and browns of fading ferns, such as fringe the borders of the one before me, with a background of scarlet whortleberry bushes and deep-green sprays of blackberry clustering about the loosening bark of a crumbling stump, with its shelving growth of fungus hiding among its brown debris, one may well pause and wonder which to choose, or where a single touch is wanting in the perfect unity and harmony of either.

WAIFS.

Another jutting corner, and we confront a swaying mass of gold and purple—that magnificent regal combination of graceful golden-rod and asters that glorifies our autumn from September to the falling leaf. There are a number of species of golden-rod, varying as much in their intensity of color as in their time of bloom. The earliest appear in the heart of summer, in wood and meadow; while others, larger and more stately, lift up in their midst their plumy, undeveloped tips, and wait until their predecessors are old and gray ere they roll out their wreaths of gold. For weeks the roads and by-ways have been lit up with their brilliant glow, that parting sunset gleam that lingers with the closing year. This splendid cluster is full six feet in height, and towers above the highest rail, or rather where the rail ought to be, for it is lost from sight beneath a dense fret-work of prickly smilax—and such brilliant, polished leaves! how they glitter in the sun! almost as though wet with dew.

And to think how those prickly canes, denuded of their leaves, are sold upon our city thoroughfares as “Spanish rose-trees” to the unsuspecting passer-by! Those guileless venders, too! I remember one that sought to enrich my store of botanical knowledge by telling me they “bloomed in winter!” and had a flower as “big as a saucer,” and “kinder like a holy hawk!!!?” I looked him straight in the eye, but he was the picture of innocence. “Can you tell me the botanical name,” I asked. “Oh yes,” he glibly replied, “I think they call it the *Rubus epistaxis*.” Eheu! but this was *too much*, and he saw it, and with a wink of his foxy eye and a shrewd grin, he whispered along the palm of his hand, “Got to git a livin’ *somehow*, boss; now *don’t* give me away.” “Here you are, lady, Spanish roses, lady, fresh from the steamer.” I never see a thicket of green-brier without thinking of its “winter blossom;” and, by-the-way, did you ever notice a thicket of this shrub, what a defiant, arbitrary tyrant it is—shutting out the very life-breath and light of day from its encumbered victims, monopolizing everything within its power, and even reaching out for more with searching tips in mid-air, and a couple of greedy tendrils at every leaf? And did you ever notice along the road that delicious whiff that comes to you every now and then, that pungent breath of the sweet-fern? We get it now; the air is laden with it from the dark-green beds across the road. The sweet-fern, as I remember it, was the simpler’s panacea and the small boy’s joy—an aromatic shrub, whose inhaled fumes, together with its corn-silk rival, seem destined by an all-wise Providence as a preparatory tonic to the more ambitious fumigation of after-years. Many a time have I sat upon this bank and tried to imagine in my domestic product the racy flavor of the famed Havana!

Between old Aunt Huldy, with her mania for the simples, and the demand of the village boys, I wonder there is any of it left. But Aunt Huldy has long since died; all her “yarbs,” and “yarrer tea,” and “paowerful gud stimmilants” could not give her the lease of eternal earthly life which she said lurked in the “everlastin’ flaowers;” and after she had reached the age of one hundred and three, her tansy decoctions and boneset potions ceased in their efficacy—the feeble pulse grew feebler, and one winter’s eve, sitting in her rocker by her kettle and andirons, she fell into a deep sleep, from which she never awoke. Aunt Huldy was as strange and eccentric a character as one rarely meets in the walks of life. Some said she was crazy; others said she was a witch; but whatever she may have been, this aged dame was picturesque with her bent figure, her long white hair and scarlet hood. And who shall describe the ancient withered face that looked out from the shadow of that hood, the small gray eyes and heavy white eyebrows, the toothless jaws and receding lips, and massive chin that made its appalling ascent across the face? But I cannot describe that face: think of how a witch should look, and old Huldy’s features will rise up before you. She knew every herb that grew, but her great stand-by was “sweet-fern:” she smoked it, she chewed it, she drank it, and even wore a little bag of it around her neck, “to charm away the rheumatiz.”



IN THE CORNFIELD.

Since her time, however, the sweet-fern has had a chance to recuperate, and, as far as we can see along the road, the banks are covered with it; and there's a clump of teazles in its midst! I wonder if that old carding-mill still stands. You also, perhaps, will wonder what relation can exist between the two, that should make my thoughts jump half a mile at the sight of a roadside weed. But that old woollen-mill offered a premium on the extermination of one weed at least, for all the teasels of the neighborhood were required to keep its cloth brushes in thorough repair; but I fear its buzzing wheels are silent, for in olden times no such splendid clump as this could have remained to go to seed upon the highway. This old mill lies right upon our path, only a short walk down the road beyond. It nestles among a bower of willows in a picturesque ravine known as the "Devil's Hollow"—an umbrageous, rocky glen, by far too cool and comfortable a place to justify the name it bears.

Following the road, we now descend into a long, low stretch, hedged in between two tall banks of alder, overtopped with interwoven tangles of clematis, with its cloudy autumn clusters—that graceful vine which, like the dandelion, is even more beautiful in death than in the fulness of its bloom. And so, indeed, are nearly all those plants whose final state is thus endowed by nature with feathery wings to lift them from the earth.

When has this swamp milk-weed by the roadside looked so fair as now, with its bursting pods and silky seeds—those little waifs thrown out upon the world with every passing breeze. How tenderly they seem to cling to the little cosy home where they have been so snugly cradled and protected; and see how they sail away, two or three together, loth to part, until some rude gust shall separate them forever.

And here's the great spiny thistle, too, that armed highwayman with florid face and pompon in his cap. But he has had his day, and now we see him old and seedy; his spears are broken, and his silvery gray hairs are floating everywhere and glistening in the sun.

Now we leave the alders, and another roadside mosaic of rich color opens up before us, where the old half-wall fence, with its overtopping rails, is luminous with a crimson glow of ampelopsis. It covers all the stones for yards and yards; it swings from every jutting rail; it clambers up the tree trunks and envelops them in fire, and hangs its waving fringe from all the branches.

Above the wall, like an encampment of thatched wigwams, the corn-shocks lift their heads; a prospecting colony encamped among a field rich with outcroppings of gold—a wealth of great round nuggets all in sight. And were we to tear away that thatch, we might see where they have stowed away their accumulated grains of wealth. We hear their rustling whispers: "Hush! hush!" they seem to say to each other as we approach; but their wariness is gratuitous, for a tell-tale vine is creeping away upon the fence near-by, and has stopped to rest its golden burden on the summit of the wall, half hiding among the scarlet creepers.

Here yellow brakes abound, spreading their broad, triangular fronds on every side amid the brilliant berries of wild-rose, and pink leaves of blueberry. And here are thickets of black-alder, where every twig is studded with scarlet beads, that cling so close that even winter's bluster cannot shake them off. No matter where we look in these October days, nature is burning itself away in a blaze of color that dazzles the eyes; and now we approach its very crowning touch.

I wish every one might see this gorgeous combination of oak and maples; see it and go no farther, for a further search were fruitless in finding its equal. It is the pride of the entire community; towns-people and visitors ride from miles around to see its final flush—a magnificent climax in the way of concentration of vivid color, in which nature seems to have grouped with distinct purpose and design, producing a piece of natural landscape-gardening such as no art could have approached. The background is a massive precipice of rock towering to the height of eighty feet, itself a perfect medley of tone.

The group is composed of eight maples, each a distinct contrast of pure color. In their midst a superb large oak presents one massive breadth of deep purple green; and spreading up one side like a flood of yellow light, a rock-maple lifts its splendid array of foliage. These two trees concentrate the effect, and the others are arranged around them like colors on a palette: one is a flaming scarlet, another beside it is always a rich green, even to the falling leaf—with only a single branch, that every year, even as early as August, persists in turning to a peculiar salmon pink; another, a red-maple, is so deep a red as to appear almost maroon, and its branches intermingle with the pale-pink verdure of another growing by its side. There is one that combines every intermediate color, from deep crimson to the palest saffron; while its neighbor flutters in the wind with every leaf a brilliant butterfly of pure green, with spots

and splashes of deep carmine.

This whole assemblage of color fairly blazes in the landscape, and even from the top of Mount Pisgah, a half a mile away, it looks like a glowing coal dropped down upon a bed of smouldering ashes in the valley; for the surrounding meadow is thick-set with great gray rocks and crimson viburnum, as though it had caught fire from the flaming trees. What other country can boast the glory of a tree which, taken all in all, can hold its own beside our lovely maple? From the time when first it hangs its silken tassels to the awakening spring breeze until its autumn fire has burned away its leaves, it presents an everchanging phase that lends a distinct expression to American landscape. It affords us grateful shade in summer; and with its trickling bounty in the spring we can all unite in a hearty toast, “A health to the glorious maple.”

THE ROAD TO THE MILL.

But there is another tree which should not be forgotten, and if once seen in a New England autumn landscape there is little danger of its escaping from the memory. Of course, I refer to the pepperidge, or tupelo, that nondescript among trees; for who ever saw two pepperidge-trees alike? They seem to scorn a reputation for symmetry, or even the idea of establishing among themselves the recognition of a type of character. Novelty or grotesqueness is their only aim, and they hit the bull’s-eye every time. There is one I have in mind that has always been a perfect curiosity. Its height is fully seventy feet, and its crown is as flat as though cut off with a mammoth pair of pruning-shears. The central trunk runs straight up to the summit, from which it squirms off into six or seven snake-like branches, that dip downward and writhe among the other limbs, all falling in the same direction. One gets the impression, on looking at it, that originally it might have been a respectable-looking tree, but that in some rude storm in its early days it had been struck by lightning, torn up by the roots, and afterward had taken root at the top. The tupelo, whenever seen, is always one of our most picturesque trees, and a never-failing source of surprise, twisting and turning into some unheard-of shape, and seeming always to say, “There! beat that if you can!” Near the coast it assumes the form of a crazy Italian pine, with spindling trunk and massive head of foliage. Sometimes it divides in the middle, like an hour-glass, and again mimics a fir-tree in caricature; but he who would keep track of the acrobatic capers of the tupelo would have his hands full. Whatever its shape, however, its brilliant, glossy crimson foliage forms one of the most striking features of our October landscape.

But I believe we were on the road to that carding-mill. We had almost forgotten it; and now, as we look ahead, we see the old lumber-shed that marks the upper ledge of Devil’s Hollow. From this old shed a trout-brook plunges through a series of rocky terraces, now winding among prostrate moss-grown trunks, now gurgling through the bare roots of great white birches, or spreading in a swift, glassy sheet as it pours across some broad shelving rock, and plunges from its edge in a filmy water-fall. It roars pent up in narrow cañons, and out again it swirls in a smooth basin worn in the solid rock. At almost every rod or two along its precipitous course there is a mill somewhere hid among the trees—queer, quaint little mills, some built up on high stone walls, others fed with trickling flumes which span from rock to rock, supporting on every beam a rounded cushion of velvety green moss, and hanging a fringe of ferns from almost every crevice. And one there is in ruins, fallen from its lofty perch, and piled in chaos in the stream. There are saw-mills, and shook-mills, and carding-mills, seven altogether in this one descent of about three hundred feet. The water enters the ravine as pure as crystal; but in its wild booming through race-ways, dams, and water-wheels, it gradually assumes a rich sienna hue from the *débris* of sawdust everywhere along its course. The interior of the ravine is musical with the trebles of the falling water and the accompaniment of the rumbling mills. Tiny rainbows gleam beneath the water-falls, and swarms of glistening bubbles and little islands of saffron-colored foam float away upon the dark-brown eddies.

At last we reach the carding-mill, which is the lowest of them all—in every sense, it seems, for it is as I had feared: the flume is but a pile of brown and mouldy timbers in the bed of the stream, and the old box-wheel has rotted and fallen from its spokes, almost obscured beneath a rank growth of weeds. No sound of buzzing teasels, no rumbling of the water-wheel, no happy carder singing at his work: *nothing*—but a couple of boys, kneeling in a corner, sucking cider through a straw. Yes, the old mill has fallen from grace; but what else might one expect from a mill in “Devil’s Hollow,” where all its neighbors are engaged in making hogshead staves, and the very water has turned to ruddy wine?

THE CIDER MILL.

The carding-machine is gone, and has given place to a rustic cider-press. A temporary undershot-wheel has been rigged beneath the floor, and a rude trough, patched up with sods, conducts the water from the stream.

It is the same old cider-press we all remember, and with the same accessories. Here are casks of all sizes waiting to be filled, and the piles of party-colored apples spilled upon the floor from the farmers' wagons that every now and then back up to the open door. There is the same rustic harangue on leading agricultural topics, among which we hear a variety of opinions about that imaginary "line storm."

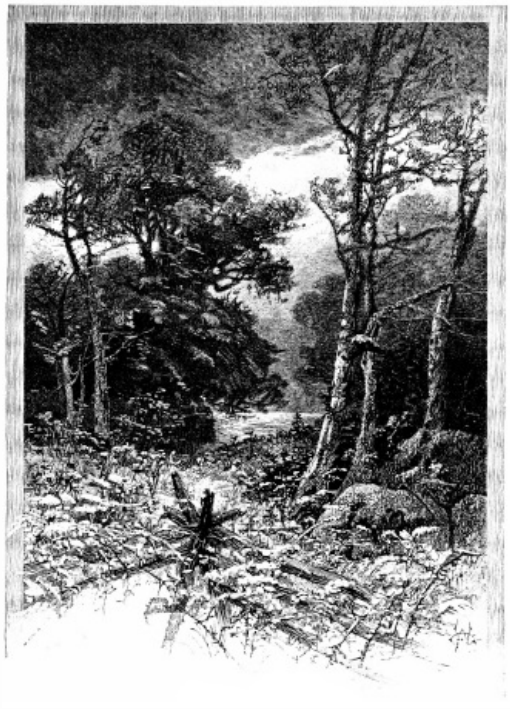
"Seems to gi'n the slip this year," remarks one old long-limbed settler with a slope-roofed straw hat, "'n' I don't know zactly what to *make* on't; but I ain't so sartin nuther"—he now takes a wise observation of a small patch of blue sky through the trees overhead. "I cal'late we'll git a leetle tetch on't yit."

"Likenuff, likenuff," responds another, with a squeaky voice; "the ar's gittin' ruther dampish, 'n' my woman hez got the rheumatiz ag'in. She kin alluz tell when we're goin' to git a spell o' weather; it's sure to fetch her all along her spine. But I lay *most* store on them ar pesky tree-tuds. I heern um singin' like all possessed ez I wuz comin' through the woods yender; 'n' it's a sartin sign o' rain when them ar critters gits agoin', you kin depend on't."

And now we hear all about the pumpkin and the corn crop, the potato yield, and the regular list of other subjects so dear to the rural heart.

In a corner by themselves we see the pile of "vinegar nubbins"—a tanned and soft variety of apple—in all stages of variegation. The "hopper" receives the shovelfuls of fruit for the crushing "smasher," which again supplies the straw-laid press. We hear the creaking turn of the lever screw, the yielding of the timbers, and a fresh burst of the trickling beverage flowing from the surrounding trough into the great wooden tub below. Here, too, is the swarm of eager urchins, with heads together, like a troop of flies around a grain of sugar. Ah! what unalloyed bliss is reflected from their countenances as they absorb the amber nectar through the intermediate straw—that golden link that I have missed for many a year!

Outside upon the logs the refuse "pumice-cheese" has brought together all the yellow-jackets and late butterflies of the neighborhood—butterflies so tipsy that you can pick them up between your fingers. I never went so far with the yellow-jackets, for they have a hotter temper, and don't like to be fooled with. Black hornets, too, are here, and they find a feast spread at their very door; for overhead, upon the beech, they have hung their paper house, like a gray balloon caught among the branches.



“THE LINE STORM.”

Now we hear a chatter and a scratching on the roof, where a pair of lively squirrels hold a game of tag; and ascending the rickety stairs into the loft above, we find the floor strewn with hickory-nuts, with neat round holes cut through on either side, and numberless shaggy butternuts, too, with daylight let into their recesses also. The boards and beams are covered with cobweb trimmings, laden with wool-dust; and as we approach a pile of rusty iron near the murky window, we hear a scraping of sharp claws, the dropping of a nut between the rafters, and now a wild scampering on the roof overhead. Before we have fairly recovered from our surprise, we notice a sudden darkening of a hole in the shingles close by, where, still and motionless, two inquisitive black eyes look down at us. We have intruded upon private property, for this is the home of the squirrels. No one can dispute their title, for these little squatters have occupied the premises and held the fort for nearly twenty years.

They, too, have found forage close at hand, from the nut-grove upon the hill-side yonder—a yellow bank of foliage of clustered hickories and beeches, and rounded domes of chestnuts—a grove whose every rock and bush is my old-time friend; where there are “sermons in stones,” and every tree speaks volumes.

Here is the low thicket of weeds and hazel-bushes where we always flushed that flock of quail, or started up some lively white-tailed hare that jumped away among the quivering brakes and golden-rod. Here are soft beds of rich green moss, studded with scarlet berries of winter-green and partridge-vine. Now we come upon a creeping mat of princess-pine, and here among the leaves we had almost stepped upon a spreading chestnut-burr—that same burr I have so often seen before, that same fuzzy, open palm holding out its tempting bait to lure the eagerness of youth; an eagerness which always invested a neighbor’s chestnuts with a peculiar charm too tempting to resist; “take one,” it seems to say, as it did in years ago; and its hedge of thorny prickles truly typifies the dangers which surrounded such an undertaking, for these trees belong to Deacon Turney, and he prizes them as though their yellow autumn leaves were so much gold. He guards them with an eagle’s eye, and he gathers all their harvest; no single nut is ever known to sprout in Turney’s woods if *he* knows it.

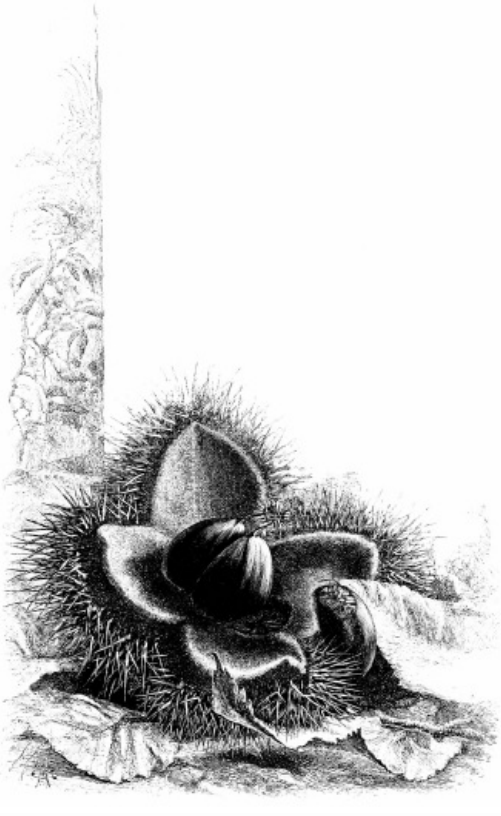
This pointed reminder among the leaves fairly pricks my conscience as I recall the many October escapades in which it formed the chief attraction. I remember one occasion in particular, for it is indelibly impressed on my memory, and it was on this very spot. A party of adventurous lads, myself among the number, were out for a glorious holiday. Each had his canvas bag across his shoulder, and we stole along the stone wall yonder, and entered the woods beneath that group of chestnuts. Two of us acted as outposts on picket guard; and another, young Teddy Shoopegg by name, the best climber in the village, did the shaking. He prided himself on being able to “shin up any tree in the caounty,” and after he had once got up among those chestnut-trees we stood from under, and in a very short space of time no single burr was left among their branches. There were five busy pairs of hands beneath those trees, I can tell you, for each one of us fully realized the necessity of making the most of his time, not knowing how soon the warning cry from our outposts might put us all to headlong flight; for the alarm, “Turney’s coming!” was enough to lift the hair of any boy in town.

But luck seemed to favor us on that day; we “cleaned out” six big chestnut-trees, and then turned our attention to the hickories. There was a splendid tall shagbark close by, with branches fairly loaded with the white nuts in their open shucks. They were all ready to drop, and when the shaking once commenced, the nuts came down like a shower of hail, bounding from the rocks, rattling among the dry leaves, and keeping up a clatter all around. We scrambled on all fours, and gathered them by quarts and quarts. There was no need of poking over the leaves for them, the ground was covered with them in plain sight. While busily engaged, we noticed an ominous lull among the branches overhead.

“’Sst! ’sst!” whispered Shoopegg up above; “I see old Turney on his white horse daown the road yender.”

“Coming this way?” also in a whisper, from below.

“I dunno yit, but I jest guess you’d better be gittin’ reddy to leg it, fer he’s hitchin’ his old nag ’t the side o’ the road. *Yis*, sir, I bleeve he’s a-cummin’. Shoopegg, you’d better be gittin’ aout o’ this,” and he commenced to drop hap-hazard from his lofty perch. In a moment, however, he seemed to change his mind, and paused, once more upon the watch. “Say, fellers,” he again broke in, as we were preparing for a retreat, “he’s gone off to’rd the cedars; he



A POINTED REMINDER.

ain't cummin' this way at *all*." So he again ascended into the tree-top, and finished his shaking in peace, and we our picking also. There was still another tree, with elegant large nuts, that we had all concluded to "finish up on." It would not do to leave it. They were the largest and thinnest-shelled nuts in town, and there were over a bushel in sight on the branch tips. Shoopegg was up among them in two minutes, and they were showered down in torrents as before. And what splendid, perfect nuts they were! We bagged them with eager hands, picked the ground all clean, and, with jolly chuckles at our luck, were just about thinking of starting for home with our well-rounded sacks, when a change came over the spirit of our dreams. There was a suspicious noise in the shrubbery near by, and in a moment more we heard our doom.

"Jest yeu look *ee*ah, yeu boys!" exclaimed a high-pitched voice from the neighboring shrubbery, accompanied by the form of Deacon Turney, approaching at a brisk pace, hardly thirty feet away. "Don't yeu think yeu've got jest abaout *enuff* o' them nuts?"

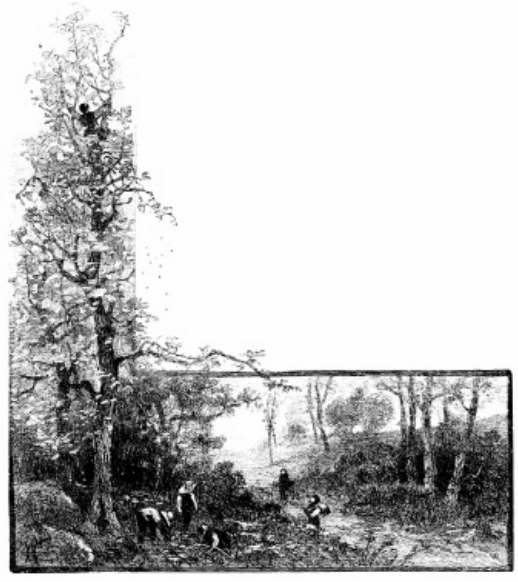
Of course a wild panic ensued, in which we made for the bags and dear life; but Turney was prepared and ready for the emergency, and, raising a huge old shot-gun, he levelled it, and yelled, "Don't any on ye stir ner move, or by Christopher I'll blow the heels clean off'n the hull *pile* on ye. I'd *shoot* ye quicker'n *lightni'*."

And we believed him, for his aim was true, and his whole expression was not that of a man who was trifling. I never shall forget the uncomfortable sensation that I experienced as I looked into the muzzle of that double-barrelled shot-gun, and saw both hammers fully raised too. And I can clearly see now the squint and the glaring eye that glanced along those barrels. There was a wonderfully persuasive power lurking in those horizontal tubes; so I at once hastened to inform the deacon that we were "not going to run."

"Wa'al," he drawled, "it looked a leetle thet *way*, I thort, a spell *ago*;" and he still kept us in the field of his weapon, till at length I exclaimed, in desperation.

"For gracious sake! point that gun in some other *way*, will you?"

"Wa'al, *no*! I'm not fer pintin' it ennywhar else jest *yit*—not until you've sot them ar *bags* daown agin, jist whar ye *got* 'em, every *one* on ye." The bags were speedily replaced, and he slowly lowered his gun.



AFTER THE SHELL-BARKS

"Wa'al, naow," he continued, as he came up in our midst, "this is putty bizniss, *ain't* it? Bin havin' a putty likely sort o' time teu, I sh'd jedge from the looks o' these 'ere *bags*. One—two—*six* on 'em; an' I vaow they must be nigh on teu a half bushel in every pleggy *one* on 'em. Wa'al, naow"—with his peculiar drawl—"look eeah: you're a putty ondustrious lot o' *thieves*, I'm *blest* if ye ain't." But the deacon did all the talking, for his manœuvres were such as to render us speechless. "Putty likely place teu cum a-nuttin', ain't it?" Pause. "Putty nice mess o' shell-barks ye got thar, I tell ye naow.—Quite a sight o' *chestnuts* in *yourn*, ain't they?"

There was only one spoken side to this dialogue, but the pauses were eloquent on both sides, and we boys kept up a deal of tall thinking as we watched the deacon alternate his glib remarks by the gradual removal of the bags to the foot of a neighboring tree. This done, he seated himself upon a rock beside them.

"*Thar!*" he exclaimed, removing his tall hat and wiping his white-fringed forehead with a red bandanna handkerchief. "I'm much *obleeged*. I've been a-watchin' on ye gittin' these 'ere nuts the hull arternoon. I thort ez haow yeu might like to know on't." And then, as though a happy thought had struck him, what should he do but deliberately spit on his hands and grasp his gun. "Look *ee*ah"—a pause, in which he cocked both barrels—"yeu boys wuz paowerful anxyis teu git *away* from *ee*ah a spell ago. Naow yeu kin *git* ez lively ez yeu pleze; your chores is done fer to-day." And bang! went one of the gun-barrels directly over our heads.

We *got*, and when once out of gun-range we paid the deacon a wealth of those rare compliments for both eye and ear that always swell the boys' vocabulary.

"All right," he yelled back in answer, as he transported the bags across the field. "Cum agin next year—cum agin. Alluz welcome! alluz welcome!"

As I have already said, the deacon gathered all his nut harvest—sometimes by a very novel method.

Who does not remember some such episode of the old jolly days? If it was not a Deacon Turney, it was some one else. I am sure his counterpart exists in every country town, and in the memory of every boyhood experience.

We remember, perhaps, the sweet hazel-nuts which we gathered in their brown husks and spread to dry upon the garret floor, and how those mischievous mice avenged the deacon's wrongs as they invaded our treasured store, and transported it to the nooks and kinks among the rafters and beneath the floor. Then there were those rambles after "fox-grapes," and the "gunning" tramps, when we stole with cautious step upon the unseen "Bob White" whistling for us among the brush near by, when the startling *whirr* of the ruffed grouse from almost under our feet sent an electric thrill up our backs and along our arms, even touching off the powder in our barrels unawares. There were box-traps in the woods, and snares among the copses, and lots of other mischief of which we would not care to tell.

A CORNER OF THE FARM.

There was another little three-cornered nut that fell among the beech-trees where we held our October picnics, and the autumn beech forest I remember as a lovely woodland parlor. We sit upon a painted rock, in the shadow of a drooping hemlock, perhaps. Beyond, we look across among the smooth gray tree-trunks, where sidelong shadows softly stripe the matted leaves, with here and there a shining shaft of sunbeam lighting up the carpet, or a glinting spray of sun-tipped leaves that flicker above their shadows. The woods are filled with a luminous glow such as no summer forest ever knew—an all-pervading light which seems almost independent of the sunshine, as though living in the leaf itself. It floods the mottled bark, and transforms its ashy tints to softened autumn grays. It searches out the shadows of the evergreens, and throws its mellow glow upon the rocks among their recesses. It permeates the whole interior as though it were transfigured through a golden-colored glass.

A quick, sharp whistle surprises you from the herbage near by, and a striped chickaree skips across the leaves and dives into his burrow at the foot of an old stump not far away. There are various other sounds that come to you if you sit quietly in a beech wood. Now it is a tiny footfall, a pat-pat upon the leaves, and a little brown bird is seen, hopping in and out among the undergrowth, scratching and pecking like a little hen among the leaf mould. Then comes a galloping sound, and you know there is a scampering hare somewhere about. And at last a peeping frog gains confidence, and starts up a trill somewhere behind you. He is soon joined by another, and still others, until a chorus of the shrill voices echoes among the trees, some from the around, some from the limbs overhead; and if you only sit perfectly still, you may hear a venturesome voice, perhaps, at your very elbow; for these little peepers are capricious songsters, and only sing before a quiet, attentive audience. Now a silly green katydid flits by, like an animated gauzy leaf; and quick as thought a kingbird darts out from the leaves overhead, hovers in mid-air for a second, and is away again; and luckless katydid wishes she *hadn't*.

See the variety of beeches, too! Here are slender, dappled stems, clean and trim; and others, great giants with fluted trunks and gnarled roots, and with eccentric limbs reaching out in most fantastic angles; but all spreading above in a graceful, airy screen of intermingled tracery and sunlight, where slender branches bend and sway beneath the agile squirrel as he leaps from tree to tree, and the leaves clatter with the falling nuts. Behind us a soft fluttering of many wings betrays a slender mountain-ash, with its drooping clusters of berries, growing in an open, rocky space near by—where a flock of cedar birds assemble among the fruit, or scatter away amid the evergreens at your slightest movement. Turning your head in another direction, you can follow the course of an old farm-road that leads out upon a bright clearing, thick-set with light-green, feathery ferns. A few rods beyond, it makes a sudden downward turn through a dense grove of lofty pines and hemlocks. Here are "dim aisles" where dwell perpetual twilight—where no ray of sun has entered for well-nigh a century—only, perhaps, as it is brought down in a glistening sunbeam within the crystal bead of balsam upon some dropping cone. There is a solemn stillness in these stately halls, in which your very footfall is proscribed and hushed in the depths of the brown and silent carpet. There are old, venerable gray-beards here, and fallen monarchs lying prostrate among the rugged rocks; and here and there among the brown debris a fungus lifts its head, to tell of other generations that lie crumbling beneath the mould. Now among the lofty columns, like a magnificent illuminated window in some vast cathedral, comes a glimpse of the outer world with its autumn colors; and here the vaulted aisle soon leads us. We find a dazzling contrast; for in the sombre shadows of the pine-forest one readily forgets the month, or even the season. Here we approach a rippling trout-stream, and as we stop to rest upon its tottering bridge we look across a long brook meadow, where the asters screen the ground in mid-air in a purple sea—one of the rarest spectacles of autumn. But in this swamp lot there are presented a continual series of just such rich displays from spring-time till the winter.

I know of no other place in which the progress of the year is so readily traced as in these swampy fallow lands.

They are a living calendar, not merely of the seasons alone, but of every month successively; and its record is almost unmistakably disclosed. It is whispered in the fragrant breath of flowers, and of the aromatic herbage you crush beneath your feet. It floats about on filmy wings of dragon-fly and butterfly, or glistens in the air on silky seeds. It skips upon the surface of the water, or swims among the weeds beneath; and is noised about in myriads of tell-tale songs among the reeds and sedges. The swallows and the starlings proclaim it in their flight, and the very absence of these living features is as eloquent as life itself. Even in the simple story of the leaf, the bud, the blossom, and the downy seed, it is told as plainly as though written in prosaic words and strewn among the herbage.

In the early, blustering days of March, there is a stir beneath the thawing ground, and the swamp cabbage-root sends up a well protected scout to explore among the bogs; but so dismal are the tidings which he brings, that for weeks no other venturing sprout dares lift its head. He braves alone the stormy month—the solitary sign of spring, save, perhaps, the lengthening of the alder catkins that loosen in the wind. April woos the yellow cowslips into bloom along the water's edge, and the golden willow twigs shake out their perfumed tassels. In May the prickly carex blossoms among the tussocks, and the calamus buds burst forth among their flat, green blades. June is heralded on right and left by the unfurling of blue-flags, and the eyebright blue winks and blinks as it awakens in the dazzling July sun.

BEECH-NUTTING.

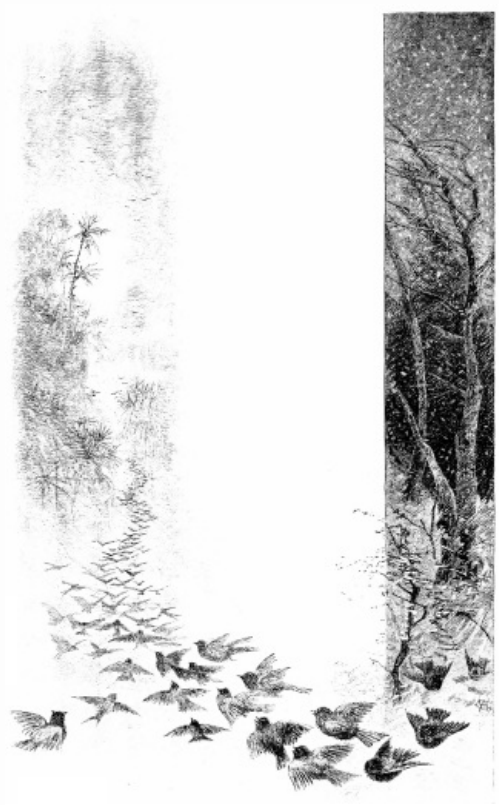
Then follows brimful August, with the summer's consummation of luxuriance and bloom; with flowers in dense profusion in bouquets of iron-weed and thoroughworts, of cardinal flowers and fragrant clethra, with their host of blossoming companions. The milk-weed pods fray out their early floss upon September breezes, and the blue petals of the gentian first unfold their fringes. October overwhelms us with the friendly tokens of burr marigolds and bidens; while its thickets of black-alder lose their autumn verdure, and leave November with a "burning bush" of scarlet berries hitherto half-hidden in the leafage. Now, too, the copses of witch-hazel bedeck themselves, and are yellow with their tiny ribbons. December's name is written in wreaths of snow upon the withered stalks of slender weeds and rushes, which soon lie bent and broken in the lap of January, crushed beneath their winter weight. And in fulfilment of the cycle, February sees the swelling buds of willow, with their restless pussies eager for the spring, half creeping from their winter cells.

The October day is a dream, bright and beautiful as the rainbow, and as brief and fugitive. The same clouds and the same sun may be with us on the morrow, but the rainbow will have gone. There is a destroyer that goes abroad by night; he fastens upon every leaf, and freezes out its last drop of life, and leaves it on the parent stem, pale, withered, and dying.

Then come those closing days of dissolution, the saddest of the year, when all nature is filled with phantoms, and the gaunt and naked trees moan in the wind—every leaf a mockery, every breeze a sigh. The air seems weighed with a premonition of the dreariness to come. The landscape is darkened in a melancholy monotone, and death is written everywhere. You may walk the woods and fields for hours without a gleam of comfort or a cheering sound. We hear, perhaps, the hollow roll of the woodpecker upon some neighboring tree; but even he is clad in mourning: it is a muffled drum, and the resounding limb is dead. You sit beneath the old oak-tree, but it is a lifeless rustle that grates upon your ear, while you listen half beseechingly for some cheering note from the robins in the thicket near; but they are coy and silent now, and their flight is toward the southern hills. A villanous shrike must needs come upon the scene: he alights upon a limb near by, with blood upon his beak. Murder is in his eye, and his mission here is death. And now we hear a noisy crow o'erhead: he perches upon a neighboring tree in hungry scrutiny. And what is he but carrion's bird, that revels in decay and death, with raiment black as a funeral pall? In the cold gray sky we see their scattered flocks blowing in the wind with sidelong flight, and in the field below that mocking cadaver, the man of straw, shaking his flimsy arms at them in wild contortions.

There is a hopeless despondency abroad in all the air, in which the summer medleys of the birds taunt us with their memories. We yearn for one such joyful sound to break the gloomy reverie. But what bird could swell his throat

in song amidst such cheerlessness? No, Nature does not thus defeat her purpose. The hopefulness of Spring, the joyful consummation of Summer, have fled; their mission is fulfilled, and these are days for meditation on the past and future. All nature speaks of death; and there are voices of despair, and others eloquent with hope and trust. There are dead leaves that crumble into dust beneath our feet; but, if we look higher, there are others that conceal the promise of eternal life, where the undeveloped being, that perfect symbol, weaves his silken shroud, and awaits the coming of his day of full perfection. In the ground beneath he seeks his sepulchre, and he knows that at the appointed time he will burst his cerements and fly away. These are inobtrusive, silent testimonies; but they are here, and need only to be sought to unfold their prophecies.



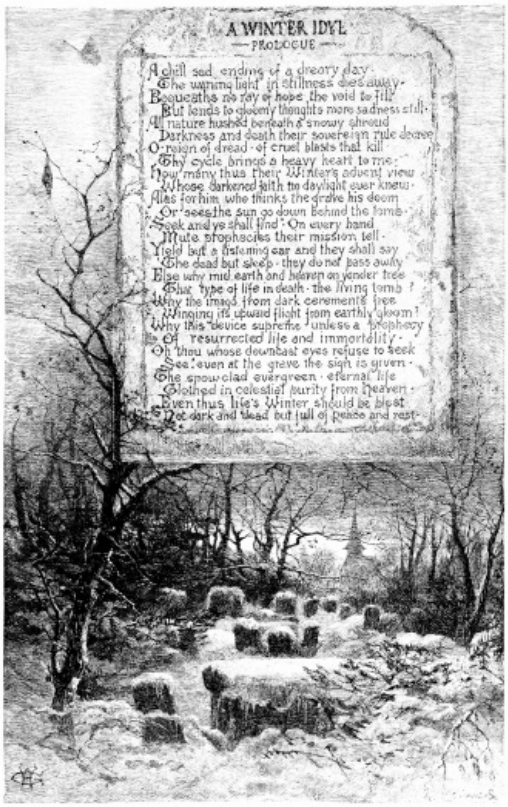
THE NORTH WIND.

But there comes a respite even in these late gloomy days. There is a lull in the work of devastation, in which the sunny skies and magic haze of October come back to us in the charming dreaminess of the Indian summer. A brief farewell—perhaps a day, perhaps a week; but however long, it is a parting smile that we love to recall in the dreariness that follows. The sky is luminous with soft sun-lit clouds, and the hazy air is laden with spring-like breezes, with now and then a welcome cricket-song or light-hearted bird-note, for, although long upon their way, the birds have not yet all departed. They twitter cheerily among the trees and thickets, and should you listen quietly you perhaps might hear an echo of spring again in the warble of the robin upon the dog-wood-tree. Here they have loitered by the way among the scarlet berries. Not only robins, but cedar-birds and thrushes are here, in successive flocks, from morn till night.

The fields are dull with faded golden-rods and asters, among whose downy seeds the frolicking chickadees and snow-birds hold a jubilee. The maze of twigs and branches in the distant hills has enveloped them in a smoky gray, and the sound of rustling leaves follows your footsteps in your woodland rambles. The fringe of yellow petals is unfolding on the witch-hazel boughs, and if you only knew the place, you might discover in some forsaken nook a solitary pale-blue lamp of fringed gentian still flickering among the withered leaves. Now a lively twittering and a hum of wings surprises you, and before you can turn your head a happy little troop of birds sweep across your path, and are away among the evergreens. They are white buntings, and their presence here is like a chill, for they come from the icy regions of the North, and they bring the snow upon their wings. The Indian summer is soon a thing of the past. Perhaps before another daybreak it will have flown. There is no dawn upon that morning. The night runs into a day of dismal, cheerless twilight, and the sky is overcast with ominous darkness. That angry cloud that left us, driven away before the conquering Spring, now lowers above the northward mountain; we see its livid face and feel its blighting breath—“a hard, dull bitterness of cold,” that sweeps along the moor in noisy triumph, that howls and tears among the trembling trees, and smothers out the last smouldering flame of faded Autumn.

The final leaf is torn from the tree. The lingering birds depart the desolation for scenes more tranquil, and I too with them, for nothing here invites my tarrying. The Autumn days are gone, grim Winter is at our door, and the covering snow will soon enshroud the earth, subdued and silent in its winter sleep.

WINTER.



A WINTER IDYL
—Prologue—

A chill sad ending of a dreary day.
The waning light in stillness dies away.
Bequeaths no ray of hope the void to fill
But lends to gloomy thoughts more sadness still.
All nature hushed beneath a snowy shroud

Darkness and death their sovereign rule decree
O, reign of dread, of cruel blasts that kill
Thy cycle brings a heavy heart to me.
How many thus their Winter's advent view
Whose darkened faith no daylight ever knew.
Alas for him who thinks the grave his doom
Or sees the sun go down behind the tomb.
"Seek and ye shall find". On every hand
Mute prophecies their mission tell.
Yield but a listening ear and they shall say
'The dead but sleep, they do not pass away'
Else why mid earth and heaven on yonder tree
That type of life in death, the living tomb?
Why the imago from dark cerements free
Winging its upward flight from earthly gloom?
Why this device supreme unless a prophecy
Of resurrected life and immortality.
Oh thou whose downcast eyes refuse to seek
See! even at the grave the sign is given.
The snow-clad evergreen, eternal life
Clothed in celestial purity from heaven.
Even thus life's Winter should be blest
Not dark and dead but full of peace and rest.

SILENTLY, like thoughts that come and go, the snow-flakes fall, each one a gem. The whitened air conceals all earthly trace, and leaves to memory the space to fill. I look upon a blank, whereon my fancy paints, as could no hand of mine, the pictures and the poems of a boyhood life; and even as the undertone of a painting, be it warm or cool, shall modify or change the color laid upon it, so this cold and frosty background through the window transfigures all my thoughts, and forms them into winter memories legion like the snow. Oh that I could translate for other eyes the winter idyl painted there! I see a living past whose counterpart I well could wish might be a common fortune. I see in all its joyous phases the gladsome winter in New England, the snow-clad hills with bare and shivering trees, the homestead dear, the old gray barn hemmed in with peaked drifts. I see the skating-pond, and hear the ringing, intermingled shouts of the noisy, shuffling game, the black ice written full with testimony of the winter's brisk hilarity. Down the hard-packed road with glancing sled I speed, past frightened team and startled way-side groups; o'er "thank you, marms," I fly in clear mid-air, and crouching low, with sidelong spurts of snowy spray, I sweep the sliding curve. Now past the village church and cosy parsonage. Now scudding close beneath the hemlocks, hanging low with their piled and tufted weight of snow. The way-side bits like dizzy streaks whiz by, the old rail fence becomes a quivering tint of gray. The road-side weeds bow after me, and in the swirling eddy chasing close upon my feet, sway to and fro. Soon, like an arrow from the bow, I shoot across the "Town Brook" bridge, and, jumping out beyond, skip the sinking ground, and with an anxious eye and careful poise I "trim the ship," and, hoping, leave the rest to fate.

Perhaps I land on both runners, perhaps I don't; that depends. I've tried both ways I know, and if I remember rightly, I always found it royal jolly fun; for what cared I at a bruise, or a pint of snow down my back, when I got it there myself?

The average New England boy is hard to kill, and I was one of that kind. Any boy who could brave the hidden mysteries and capricious favoritism of those fifteen dislocating "thank you, marms," and *hang together* through it all, and, having so done, finish that experience with a plunging double somersault into a crusted snow-bank, or, perchance, into a stone wall—if he can do this, I say, and survive the fun, then there is no reason why he should not live to tell of it in old age, for never in the flesh will he go through a rougher ordeal. I've known a boy who "*hated* the old district school because the hard benches hurt him so," and who would rest his aching limbs for hours together in this gentle sort of exercise. "The fine print made his eyes ache, and he couldn't study;" and yet when one day he comes home with one eye all colors of the rainbow, "it's *nothing*." "Consistency is a jewel." Boys don't generally wear jewels. But they are all alike. Boys will be boys, and if they only live through it, they will some day look back and wonder at their good fortune.

At the foot of that long hill the "Town Brook" gurgles on its winding way, and passing beneath the weather-beaten bridge, it makes a sudden turn, and spreads into a glassy pond behind the bulwarks of the saw-mill dam. In summer, were we as near as this, we would hear the intermittent ring of the whizzing saw, the clanking cogs, and the tuneful sounds of the falling bark-bound slabs; but now, like its bare willows that were wont to wave their leafy boughs with caressing touch upon the mossy roof, the old mill shows no sign of life. Its pulse is frozen, and the silent wheel is resting from its labors beneath a coverlet of snow. Who is there who has not in some recess of the memory a dear old haunt like this, some such sleeping pond radiant with reflections of the scenes of early life? Thither in those winter days we came, our numbers swelled from right and left with eager volunteers for the game, till at last, almost a hundred strong, we rally on the smooth black ice.

The opposing leaders choose their sides, and with loud hurrahs we penetrate the thickets at the water's edge, each to cut his special choice of stick—that festive cudgel, with curved and club-shaped end, known to the boy as a "shinney-stick," but to the calm recollection of after-life principally as an instrument of torture, indiscriminately promiscuous in its playful moments. Were I to swing one of those dainty little clubs again, I would rather that the end were tied up in something soft, and that this should be the universal rule; otherwise I don't think I would play. I would prefer to sit on the bank and watch the sport, or make myself useful in looking after the dead and wounded. But to the "average New England boy" it makes a great deal of difference who swings the club, and what it is swung for. If it is whirled in *play*, and takes him with a blow that *ought* to kill him, and *would* if he were not a boy, why then he laughs, and thinks it's good fun, and goes in and gets another. But if the parental guardian has any reason to swing a stick even one-tenth the size, the whole neighborhood thinks there is a boy being murdered. So much depends upon a name sometimes.

SNOW-FLAKES OF MEMORY.

THE OLD MILL-POND.

How clearly and distinctly I recall those toughening, rollicking sports on the old mill-pond! I see the two opposing forces on the field of ice, the wooden ball placed ready for the fray. The starter lifts his stick. I hear a whizzing sweep. Then comes that liquid, twittering ditty of the hard-wood ball skimming over the ice, that quick succession of bird-like notes, first distinct and clear, now fainter and more blended, now fainter still, until at last it melts into a whispered, quivering whistle, and dies away amidst the scraping sound of the close-pursuing skates. With a sharp crack I see the ball returned singing over the polished surface, and met half-way by the advance-guard of the leading side. The holder of the ball with rapid onward flight hugs close upon his charge, keeping it at the end of his stick. Past one and another of his adversaries he flies on winged skates, followed by a score of his companions, until, seeing his golden opportunity, with one tremendous effort he gives a powerful blow. To be sure, one of his own men interposes the back of his head and takes half the force of his stroke; but what does that matter, it was all in fun? besides, he had no business to be in the way. The ball thus retarded in such a trivial manner instantly meets a barricade of the excited opponents, who have hurried thither to save their game; but before any one can gain the time to strike the ball, the starters rush pell-mell upon them. Now comes the tug of war. Strange fun! What a spectacle! The would-be striker, with stick uplifted, jammed in the centre of a boisterous throng; the hill-sides echo with ringing shouts, and an anxious circle with ready sticks forms about the swaying, gesticulating mob. Meanwhile

the ball is beating round beneath their feet, their skates are clashing steel on steel. I hear the shuffling kicks, the battling strokes of clubs, the husky mutterings of passion half suppressed; I hear the panting breath and the impetuous whisperings between the teeth, as they push and wrestle and jam. A lucky hit now sends the ball a few feet from the fray. A ready hand improves the chance; but as he lifts his stick a youngster's nose gets in the way and spoils his stroke; he slips, and falls upon the ball; another and another plunge headlong over him. The crowd surround the prostrate pile, and punch among them for the ball. When found, the same riotous scene ensues; another falls, and all are trampled under foot by the enthusiastic crowd. Ye gods! will any one come out alive? I hear the old familiar sounds vibrating on the air: whack! whack! "Ouch!" "Get out of the way, then!" "Now I've got it!" "Shinney on yer own side!" and now a heavy thud! which means a sudden damper on some one's wild enthusiasm. And so it goes until the game is won. The mob disperses, and the riotous spectacle gives place to uproarious jollity.

There are other more tranquil reflections from that old mill-pond. Do you not remember the little pair of dainty skates whose straps you clasped on daintier feet; the quiet, gliding strolls through the secluded nooks; the small, refractory buckle which you so often stooped to conquer; and the sidelong grimaces of less fortunate swains—sneers that brought the color tingling to your cheeks with mingled pride and anger? Ah! things so near the heart as these can never freeze.

Yonder, just below that clustered group of pines, where the water-weeds and lily-pads are frozen in the ice, we chopped our fishing holes, and with baited lines and tip-ups set, we waited, wondering what our luck would be. With eager eyes we watched the line play out, or saw the tip-up give the warning sign. And as with anxious pull we neared the end of the tightening cord, who shall describe that tingling sense of joy at the first glimpse of the gaping pickerel?

Near by I see the yellow-fringed witch-hazel bending in graceful spray over the flaky, bordering ice, that mystic shrub whose feathery winter blooms we gathered as a token for the little one with dainty skates.

Still farther up the pond the marbled button-wood-tree, with spreading limbs and knotty brooms of branchlets, rises clear against the sky, its little pendulums swinging away the winter moments. At its very roots the dam spreads into a tufted swamp, thick-set with alders. How often have I picked my way through that wheezing, soggy marsh in quest of the rare Cecropia cocoons; treading among glazed air-chambers, whose roof of ice, like a pane of brittle glass, falls in at my approach—a crystal fairy grotto, set with diamonds and frost ferns, annihilated at a step.

Here, too, the sagacious musk-rat built his cemented dome, and along the neighboring shore we set the chained steel-traps, or made the ponderous dead-fall from nature's rude materials. Yonder, in the side-hill woods, I set the big box rabbit-traps; with keen-edged jack-knife trimmed the slender hickory poles, and on the ground near by, with sharpened, branching sticks, I built the little pens for my twitch-up snares. Can I ever forget the fascinating excitement which sped me on from snare to snare in those tramps through the snowy woods, the exhilarating buoyancy of that delicious suspense, every nerve and every muscle on the *qui vive* in my eagerness for the captured game! Even the memory of it acts like a tonic, and almost creates an appetite like that of old.

And then the lovely woods. How few there are who ever seek their winter solitude: and of these how fewer still are they who find anything but drear and cold monotony!

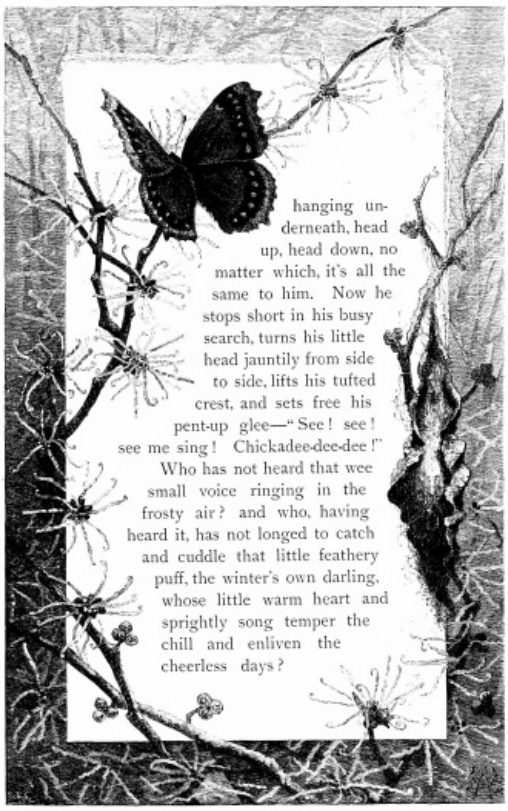
We read the literature of our time, and find it rich in story of the home aspects of winter; of Christmas joys and festivals, of holiday festivities, and all the various phases of cosy domestic life; but not often are we tempted from the glowing hearth into the wilds of the bare and leafless forest. We read of the "drear and lonely waste, the cheerless desolation of the howling wilderness," and we look out upon the naked, shivering trees and draw our cushioned rockers closer to the grateful fire.

Not I; bitter were the winds and high the piled-up drifts that shut me in from out-of-doors in those glorious days; and whether on my animated trapping tours, or hunting on the crusted snow, with powder-horn and game-bag swinging at my side, or perhaps pressing through the tangled thickets in my impetuous search for those pendulous cocoons, now stopping to tear away the loosening bark on moss-grown stump, now looking beneath some prostrate board for the little "woolly bears" curled up in their dormant sleep: no matter what my purpose, always I was sure to find the winter full of interest and beauty. How distinctly I recall the thrilling spectacle of that glad morning when, awakening early, and jumping from the little cot so snug and warm, I tripped across the chilly floor and scratched a peep-hole on the frosted window-pane; looked out upon a world so changed, so strangely beautiful, that at first it seemed like a lingering vision in half-awakened eyes—still looking into dream-land. All the world is dressed in purest white, as soft and light as down from seraphs' wings. The orchard trees, the elms, and all the leafless shrubs, as if by magic spell, transformed to shadowy plumes of spotless purity, and the interlacing boughs o'erhead vanishing in a canopy of glistening, feathery spray. I look upon a realm celestial in its beauty, unprofaned by earthly sign or sound. A strange, supernal stillness fills the air; and save where some unseen spirit-wing tips the slender twig and lets fall the scintillating shower, no slightest movement mars the enchanted vision. Above, in the far-off blue, I see the circling flock of doves, their snowy wings glittering in their upward flight—apt emblems in a scene so like a glimpse of spirit-land. A single vision such as this should wed the heart to winter's loveliness, a loveliness inspiring and immaculate, for never in the cycle of the year does nature wear a face so void of earthly impress, so spirit-like, so near the heavenly ideal.

THE FIRST SNOW.

One of the most striking features of the winter ramble in the woods is their impressive stillness. But stop awhile and listen. That very silence will give emphasis to every sound that soon shall vibrate on the clear atmosphere, for "little pitchers have big ears," and wide-open eyes too. They will first be sure that the stick you hold is only a cane, and not the small boy's gun which they have so learned to dread. Hark! even from the hollow maple at your side there comes a scraping sound, and in an instant more two black and shining eyes are peering down at us from the bulging hole above. Tut! don't strike the little fellow. Had you only waited a moment longer, we would have seen him emerge from his concealment, and with frisky, bushy tail laid flat upon the bark, he would have hung head downward on the trunk, and watched our every movement; but now you've startled him, he thinks you mean

mischief, and you'll see his sparkling eyes no more at that knot-hole. Listen! Now we hear a rustling in the sere and snow-tipped weeds somewhere near by, and presently a little feathery form flits past, and settles yonder on the swaying rush. With feathers ruffled into a little fuzzy ball, he bustles around among the downy seeds, now prying in their midst, now

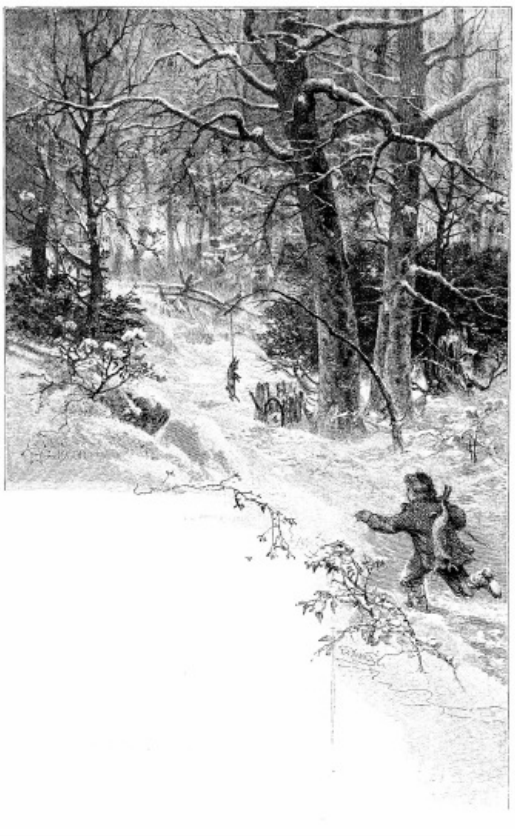


MUTE PROPHECIES.

The bending rush but lightly feels the dainty form, and, if at all, it must delight to bear so sweet a burden. How dearly have I learned to love this little fellow, perhaps my special favorite among the birds; for while the others one by one desert us with the dying year for scenes more bright and sunny, the chickadee is content to share our lot; he is constant, always with us, ever full of sprightliness and cheer. No winter is known in his warm heart, no piercing blast can freeze the fountain of his song.

How often in the woods and by-ways have I stopped and chatted with this diminutive friend as he nestled in some oscillating spray of golden-rod, or perhaps with jaunty strut shook down the new-fallen snow from some drooping branch of hemlock. I say "chatted," for he is a talkative and entertaining little fellow, always ready to tell people "all about it," if they will only ask him. He is generally too busy searching amid the dead and crumpled leaves for the indispensable *bug* to intrude himself on any one; but once draw him into conversation and he will do his share of the talking—only, mind you, remove those big fur gloves and tippet, or he will put you to shame by crying, "See! see!" and showing you his little, bare feet. This pert atom can be saucy and cross if things don't exactly suit his fancy; and, for whatever reason, he always seems out of patience at the sight of a *man* all bundled up and mittened. I have noticed this repeatedly. "Take off some of those things," he seems to say, "and let me see who you are, and then I'll talk with you," and with feathers puffed up like an indignant hen in miniature, he scolds and scolds.

Then there are the little snow-birds, too. When the sad autumn days are upon us, when the dying leaves with ominous flush yield up their hold on life, and are borne to earth on wailing winds, and all nature seems filled with mocking phantoms of the summer's life and loveliness; when we listen for the robin's song and hear it not, or the thrush's bell-like trill, and listen in vain; when we look into the southern sky and see the winged flocks departing behind the faded hills—it is at such a time, while the very air seems weighed with melancholy, that the snow-birds come with their welcome, twittering voices. All winter long these sprightly little fellows swarm the thickets and sheltering evergreens, frolicking in the new-fallen snow like sparrows in a summer pool. Sometimes they unite in flocks with the chickadees and invade the orchard, and even the kitchen door-yard, with their ceaseless chatter. If you open the window and scatter a few crumbs upon the porch, they are soon hopping among the grateful morsels with twittering thankfulness. And on a very cold day, should you leave the kitchen window standing open, they will perch upon the sill and preen their ruffled feathers. Always trusting and confiding when appreciated, but often coy and distant for want of just such kindness.



THE TWITCH-UP.

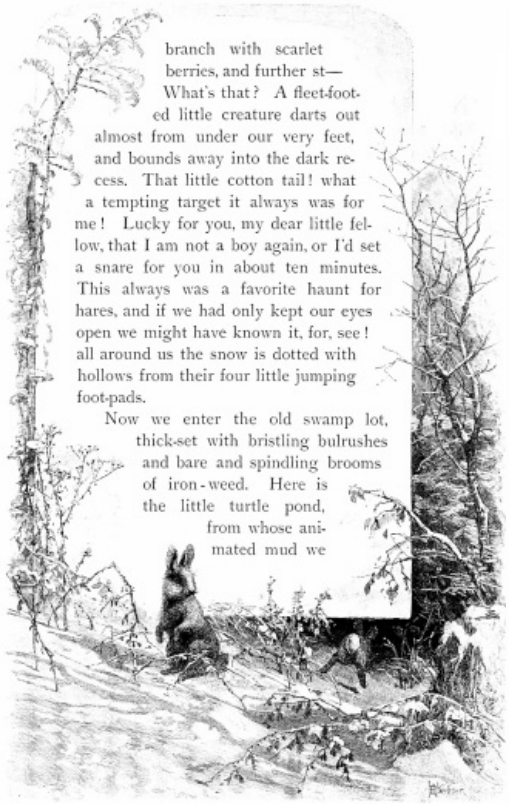
Although loving the cold, and choosing the winter season to be with us, the snow-birds cannot hold their own against the little hardy chickadee. Indeed, I sometimes think that this little frost-proof puff is happier and more sprightly in proportion as the cold increases, and that even the sight of a frozen thermometer would be, perhaps, an especial inspiration for his song. Not so the little snow-birds. When those raw and bitter winds sweep like a blight over the face of nature, their little song is frozen, and their familiar forms are seen no more. You hunt amid the evergreens and hedge-rows, but they are not there. But when the shingle-vane on the old barn-gable veers and points toward the south or west, should you chance to be in the neighborhood of the barrack mow, you would hear the muffled twittering of the little thawing voices underneath the conical roof. Here they have assembled among the wheat-sheaves still unthreshed, finding a warm and cosy shelter—"a pavilion till the storm is overpast."

The winter woods are full of life and beauty, if we will only look for them. We do as much for the summer woods, why not for the winter? Were we to seclude ourselves in-doors in June, and shut our eyes to all its loveliness, it would be only what so many do from November till the budding spring. In one respect, at least, the woods are even more beautiful in winter than in summer; for in their height of leafy splendor—sometimes to me almost oppressive in its universal greenness—the true and living tree is hidden from sight, its exquisite anatomy is concealed, and, to a certain degree, all the different trees melt into a mass of "nothing but leaves."

No one ever sees the full charm of the forest who turns his back upon it in the winter, for its clear-cut tree-forms are an unceasing delight and wonder. Look at the exquisite lines of that drooping birch, the intricate interlacing tracery of the minute branching twigs! Could anything be more graceful or more chaste? could any covering of leaves enhance its beauty? And so the apple-tree by the old stone wall—how different its various angles! how individual in its character! how beautiful its silhouette against the sky! Thus every separate tree affords a perfect study, of infinite design. See that mottled beech trunk yonder. What! never noticed it before? That was because its drooping leaf-clad branches concealed its beauty; but now not only does it emerge from its wonted obscurity, but the whiteness of the snowy ground beyond gives added value to every subtle tint upon its dappled surface. Step nearer. With what variety of exquisite tender grays has nature painted the clean smooth bark! See those marbled variegations, each spot with a distinct tint of its own, and each tint composed of a multitude of microscopic points of color. Here we see a fimbriated blotch of dark olive moss, spreading its intertwining rootlets in all directions, and further up a spongy tuft of rich brown lichen tipped with snow. Who could pass by unnoticed such a refined and exquisite bit of painting as this? And yet they abound on every side. See the shingly shagbark, with its mottlings of pale green lichen and orange spots, its jagged outline so perfectly relieved against the snow, and, beyond, that group of rock-maples, with its bold contrasts of deep green moss, and striped tints of most varied shades, from lightest drab to deepest brown. And there is the yellow birch with its tight-wound bark, fringed with ravellings of buff-colored satin. Here we come upon a clump of chestnuts, their cool trunks set off in bold relief against a background of dark hemlocks, whose outer branches, clothed in snow, like tufted mittens, hang low upon the ground.

THE WINTER’S DARLING.

Passing from the wood, we now pick our way through a neglected by-path shut in on either side with birches, whose brown and slender branches spring from a trunk so white as to be almost lost in the background tint of snow. At every step we dislodge the glistening wreaths of snowy flakes from the bluish raspberry canes. The little withered nests on the tips of the wild-carrot stems hurl their fleecy burden to the ground; and each in turn the phantom shapes give place to homely yarrows, golden-rods, or thistles. Further on we see a wild-rose



“WHO’S THAT?”

fished the bugs and polly-wogs for our aquarium. Now it is shrunken and cold with crackling ice. Around its borders a thicket of black alder grows, its close-clinging scarlet berries, half hid in summer by the overhanging foliage, now seen in all their brilliancy and profusion, the brightest touches of color in nature’s winter landscape.

Soon we are walking over the soft and silent carpet in the pine grove’s sombre shelter, stopping for one brief moment to listen to the sighing wind overhead, and to inhale one long and lasting whiff of the delicious invigorating aroma of the trees.

Once more out in the open, our attention is arrested by a little stain of blood upon the snow. Leading to the spot

we see a row of tiny imprints of some little field-mouse, and the white surface in close vicinity is ruffled and disturbed. A cruel tragedy has been committed here, and its evidence is plain, for there is but one line of wee footprints from the little hole beneath the stump near by—no return. Poor little fellow! I wish I had beneath my foot the sharp-eyed owl that surprised you in your little antics on the snow.

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW IN THE WOODS.

A deserted nest now hangs across our pathway, and as I look upon the cold heap within its hollow, I wonder where are the little birds that nestled beneath the mother's wings in the cosy warmth of that cradled home only a few short months ago. And now I am reminded that nearly all this land through which we have been strolling belongs to Nathan Beers; for there's his house right across the road, only a few rods in front of us. I cannot help but laugh as I look over into that old door-yard at the incident it recalls.

I remember how, about fifteen years ago, I came up through these very woods into the clearing where we stand, and saw old Nathan, with slouched straw hat and stoga boots, entering his front gate. He was muttering and gesticulating to himself; and on the gravel behind him he trailed along a huge steel trap and clinking chain. He evidently had a strong opinion on *some* subject, and I knew pretty well what that subject *was*.

"Hello, Nathan!" I ask, "what's up?"

He turns quickly, and I observe that his usually good-natured Yankee face now wears a troubled expression.

"My dander's up—that's what's up," he replies, a little sullenly.

"They tell me you've been after a fox, Nathan; did you catch him?"

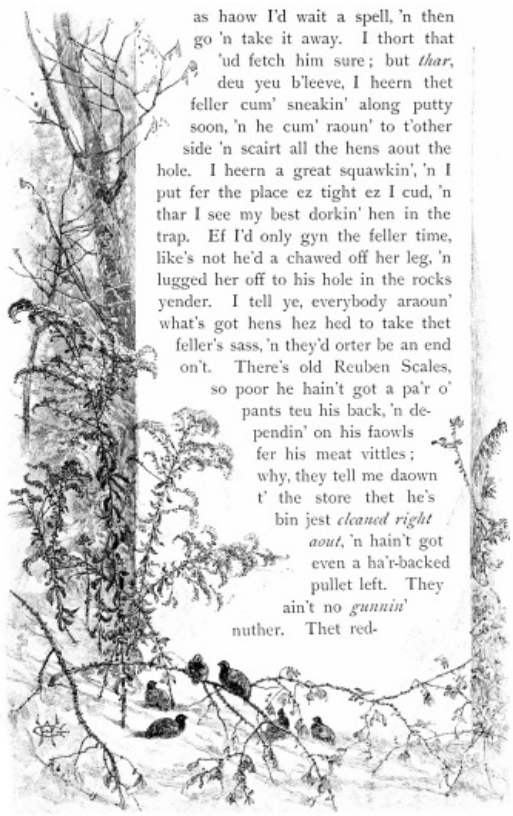
"No, 'n I don't cal'late to try agin nuther, he's *airnt his livi'* fer all *me*;" and with an impetuous fling he sent the old trap into a corner of the wood-shed.

I am soon by his side, anxious to hear all about it. "What's the fox done?" I ask, eagerly.

"What *hain't* he done, yeu better say. I never see nuthin' t' beat it since uz born, 'n I've ketched tew er three on 'em afore naow, teu. I've heern tell o' them critters' cunnin', but I swaiou I alliz thort ez haow folks wuz *coddi'*; but *thar*, yeu can't tell me nuthin' 'baout *foxes*. It's nigh cum a fortnit thet I've been arter thet feller, 'n I swar teu gosh all hemlock! I hain't got so much's one on his pesky red hairs teu *show* for't, 'n I'm *sick* on't. I tell ye that ar feller is *mischievouser than pizen*, 'n his hed's as long as a horse's."

"Why, what's he been doing, Nathan?"

"*Doin'?* why fer considerable of a spell back he's bin hangin' raoun' my hen-roost an' pickin' off my brammys; thet's what he's bin doin', 'n the *fust* time I sot the trap I stuck it under some chaff in the hole yender in the hen-haouse jest arter the hens hed gone ter roost—cal'latin'



A SUNNY CORNER.

haired thief hez knabbed every tarnal pattridge 'n Bob White they iz."

And so he went on for half an hour, telling me all the various stratagems by which Reynard had outwitted him.

"I set it thar in the pine woods in a bed of pine needles, with the ded rabbit hangin' over it, 'n the next day I see by the scratched up dirt haow the feller hed jumped clean over the trap at a *lick*, 'n taken his rabbit on a fly. Yeu kin laff; but what I'm tellin' ye is az true az preachin'. So yest'd'y I lit aout on a new idee, 'n set the trap on top a stump cluss teu a tree 'n covered it with leaves. I hung the bait on the tree higher up, 'n sez I, old feller, I've got ye naow, sez I. I left it thar. I went daown thar agin this mornin', 'n I've *jest cum* from thar. *No more fox fer me*; s'elp me gosh!"

"Why," I ask, "what was the matter down there, Nathan?"

"Why, *blame my stogys*, ef the feller hadn't gone 'n highsted the clog-stick on the end o' the chain, 'n shoved it agin the pan, 'n sprung the trap on't, 'n then stepped up and knabbed the bait. An' I say thet enny feller what's got brains enuff fer thet, I swaiou he'd oughter *live* off'n um; 'n he *kin* fer all *me*!"

It was too bad to have fooled old Nathan so; but then, you see, he had a big farm, and was awfully stingy with us boys, and never would let us set a rabbit snare on his place. He said it was "pesky *cruel*," and seemed to prefer the more humane way of wounding them with shot, and breaking their necks afterward to end their sufferings. Nathan had kept very quiet about his little game. There really was a very sly fox in the neighborhood; but boys make good foxes too, sometimes.

WINTER BROWSING.

A JANUARY THAW.

Nathan’s house was a typical New England home, with slanting roof on one side, and embowered in maples, and it had the most picturesque barn in the neighborhood. Oh you good people far off in the country everywhere, how I envy you these dear old barns! How much you ought to appreciate their homely rustic beauty! But you never will, until, like me, you are forced to live away from them, and to see them only through the golden haze of memory. Then you will learn how great a part they took in influencing your daily life and happiness.

Was ever perfume sweeter than that all-pervading fragrance of the sweet-scented hay? and was ever an interior so truly picturesque, so full of quiet harmony?

The lofty hay-mows piled nearly to the roof, the jagged axe-notched beams overhung with cobwebs flecked with dust of hay-seed, with perhaps a downy feather here and there. The rude, quaint hen boxes, with the lone nest-egg in little nooks and corners. How vividly, how lovingly, I recall each one!

In those snow-bound days, when the white flakes shut in the earth down deep beneath, and the drifts obstructed the highways, and we heard the noisy teamsters, with snap of whip and exciting shouts, urge their straining oxen through the solid barricade; when all the fences and stone walls were almost lost to sight in the universal avalanche; and, best of all, when the little district school-house upon the hill stood in an impassable sea of snow—then we assembled in the old barn to play, sought out every hidden corner in our game of hide-and-seek, or jumped and frolicked in the hay, now stopping quietly to listen to the tiny squeak of some rustling mouse near by, or, it may be, creeping cautiously to the little hole up near the eaves in search of the big-eyed owl we once caught napping there. In a hundred ways we passed the fleeting hours. The general features of New England barns are all alike; and the barn of memory is a garner full of treasure sweet as new-mown hay. You remember the great broad double doors, which made their sweeping circuit in the snow; the ruddy pumpkins, piled up in the corner near the bins, and the wistful whinny of the old farm-horse, as with pricked-up ears and eager pull of chain he urged your prompt attention to your chores; the cows, too, in the manger stalls—how pleasant their low breathing—how sweet their perfumed breath! Outside the corn-crib stands, its golden stores gleaming through the open laths, and the oxen, reaching with lapping upturned tongues, yearn for the tempting feast, “so near and yet so far.” The party-colored hens group themselves in rich contrast against the sunny boards of the weather-beaten shed, and the ducks and geese, with rattling croak and husky hiss, and quick vibrating tails (that strange contagion), waddle across the slushy snow, and sail out upon the barn-yard pond.

Here is the pile of husks from whose bleached and rustling sheaths you picked the little ravellings of brown for your corn-silk cigarettes. Did ever “pure Havana” taste as sweet?

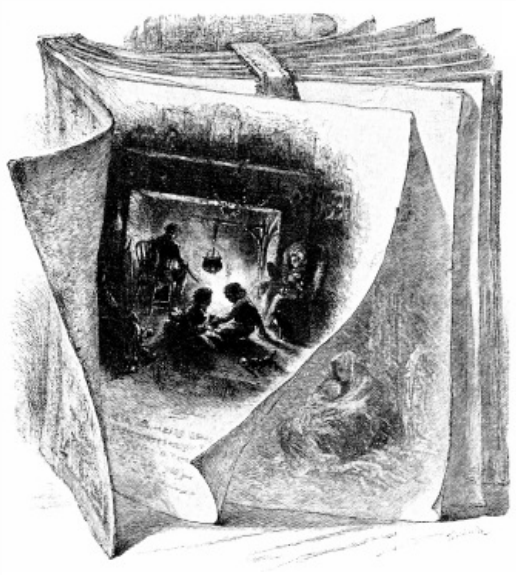
Near by we see the barracks stored with yellow sheaves of wheat. Soon we shall hear the intermittent music of the beating flail on the old barn floor, now chinking soft on the broken sheaf, now loud and clear on the sounding boards. Upon the roof above we see the cooing doves, with nodding heads and necks gleaming with iridescent sheen. Turning, in another corner we look upon a miscellaneous group of ploughs and rakes and all the farm utensils, and harness hanging on the wooden pegs. There, too, is the little sleigh we love so well. Could it but speak, how sweet a story it could tell of lovely drives through romantic glens and moonlit woods, of tender squeezes of the little hand beneath the covering robe, of whispered vows, and of the encircling arm—a shelter from the cold and cruel wind! But no—I’ll say no more: these are memories too sacred for the common ear. And there’s the carry-all sleigh just by its side. How well you’ll remember the merry loads it carried, its three wide seats and space between packed full of jolly company! How the hard-pressed snow squeaked beneath the gliding runners, as with prancing span and jingling bells you sped down through the village street, with waving handkerchiefs and cheerful greetings right and left! How with “ducking” heads and muffled screams you ran the gauntlet past the school-house mob; saw them scrambling for “a hitch,” and with tantalizing beckonings tipped your horses with the whip. Away you go through the deep ravine, with a *jing, jing, jing* on the frosty air, with voices high in merry laughs, amid loud hurrahs from the “boysterous” crowd now far behind. Now you speed through a mist of drifting snow, and the rosy cheeks tingle with the stinging icy flakes flying before the wind. Now comes another chorus of piercing screams, as the laden hemlock bough, tapped with mischievous whip, hurls down its fleecy avalanche on coat and robe, on jaunty little hat—yes, and on a small pink ear, and even down a pretty neck. Ah me! How is it possible that a shriek like that could come from a throat so fair? But so you go, with a *jing, jing, jing*, now past the mill-pond with its game, now up the hill, now through the woods and far away, now farther still, the silvery bells now scarcely heard, now fainter yet, till lost to sight and sound—but not to memory dear; for all through life we shall hear those happy jingling bells.

THE MOONLIGHT RIDE.

And when, with ruddy faces and stamping feet, we all rush in and crowd the old fireplace, how welcome the glowing warmth, how keen the relish for the appetizing spread upon the snow-white table-cloth: the smoking dish of beans, with crisp accompaniment of luscious pork; the hot brown bread so sweet; and, last of all, the far-famed Indian pudding, fresh and steaming from the old brick oven!

How distinctly I recall those long and happy evenings around that radiant hearth, the games, the stories read from welcome magazines! Little we cared for the howling storm without. I hear the tick of the ancient clock in the corner shadowed by the old arm-chair; I see the glimmer on the whitewashed wall, the festooned strings of apples, sliced and hung above the fire to dry; I hear the patient, expectant stroke of hammer on the upturned log, and now the crackling burst of the rough-shelled butternut, yielding up its long and filmy kernel; I hear the apples sizzling on the hearth, the puffy snap of pop-corn jumping in its fiery cage, the kettle singing on the pendent hook—a thousand things; and what a precious living picture of sweet home-life they all bring back to me!

But look! there is another hidden picture in the book of life—a shadowed page, which we had well-nigh forgotten. See that crouching figure in the dark, deserted street—that spurned and wretched outcast, without a home, without a friend! Perhaps if that broken heart has not already ceased to yearn, if the last spark has not yet been smothered by the driving, covering snow, we might still hear the faint and stifled sobs:



THE SHADOWED PAGE.

“Once I was loved for my innocent grace,
Flattered and sought for the charm of my face.
Father, mother, sisters, all,
God, and myself, I have lost in my fall.
The veriest wretch that goes shivering by
Will take a wide sweep lest I wander too nigh,
For of all that is on or about me, I know,
There is nothing that’s pure but the beautiful snow.
How strange it should be that this beautiful snow
Should fall on a sinner with nowhere to go!
How strange it would be, when the night comes again,
If the snow and the ice struck my desperate brain,
Fainting, freezing, dying alone!”

Life’s book is full of shadowed pages such as this; and it were well if in the midst of our contented homes, around our cheerful fires, we stopped to think and give a silent, heart-felt prayer for those who, by some strange, inexplicable fatality, seem doomed to walk with cruel burdens and with bleeding feet the path of life: no helping hand, no friend, no hope, no God.

What a terrible night! Hark how the wind moans, like a long wail from some despairing soul shut out in the awful storm! The air is filled with dense clouds of flying snow and sleet chased along by the gale. The trees bend and

writhe, and, as if in fear, scratch their boughs upon the roof; the driving flakes beat with an angry, hissing sound upon the window-panes, and for a moment there is a muffled, ominous silence. Now comes a wild and furious gust, and a great white whirlwind sweeps with serpentine contortions past the window and disappears in the thick darkness of the night. Our very walls sway and tremble to their foundation. The clap-boards snap, and some loosened blind is torn from its hinges and hurled as a feather before the raging wind. We hear a crash of breaking glass, the shaking of the old barn doors, and now a frightened neigh, half smothered in the storm.

Who would venture out in such a night as this? We shudder at the thought, and yet there is one whose holy sense of duty will see no barrier even in this fierce tempest. Even now he is urging his faithful horse onward through the lonely road, cold and benumbed, but thinking only of the suffering he hopes to relieve.

How well I remember the welcome stamping at the front door, the chinking rattle of the tin box sounding nearer and nearer up the stairs, the tall and stately figure entering the room, clad in great-coat reaching nearly to the floor, the genial smile bringing both hope and comfort with its very presence! And what a noble face! the shapely forehead, the snowy tufts of close-cut hair, the magnetic, penetrating eyes, so deep and dark, looking out from beneath the heavy jet-black brows, and the clean-shaven cheeks and chin, of almost child-like bloom, relieved against the whiteness of the stock about the throat! Never before were winter and summer so strangely and beautifully blended in a human face. But we shall see that face no more. Physician, friend, companion, all were laid away with him, and sad indeed was the day that bore him from us. And now, as I look down upon that humble grave, I would that others, with the reverence I feel, might read the sacred epitaph inscribed upon my memory, of one whose only aim through life was the relief of suffering and sorrow. In storm or calm, by day or night, he fulfilled his holy mission. And when the fearful scourge swept o’er the town, and filled its homes with woe; when friends deserted friends, and brothers left their kin, this noble soul sought out the sick and dying, cared tenderly for their sufferings until the end, and even laid the dead away alone. A life of sacrifice, for rich or poor alike, without a thought of self. Professing no religious faith—yea, *doubting* even; but finding in the precept of the “golden rule” an inspiration worthy the devotion and the effort of his life: “By their *fruits* ye shall know them.”

THE GOOD PHYSICIAN.

And so the winter goes. It has its joys and its sorrows, its strong contrasts of light and shadow. The bitter winds will freeze and rule the earth, but the sun will shine again, and the very gloom transform to glittering splendor. Soon we greet the lengthening days. The farmer heeds the warning sign. The woods resound with the stroke of the axe and crashing of falling trees; and the prostrate trunks are rolled upon the sledge and hauled away “to mill;” the fields are strewn with compost, and meadows sown with clover on the snow, fences are fixed, and hot-bed started on the sunny slope; the cackling hens have felt the prophecy, and steal away into snug little places among the hay-mows and the mangers, and lay the foundation of their future brood; the climbing bitter-sweet lets fall its scarlet seeds, and the little pussies on the willows grow day by day. How eagerly I always watched these welcome signs! for even though I loved the winter, I never sorrowed at its departure in the face of coming spring, with its promises of the medleys of the birds, of unfolding buds, and those sweet shy faces soon to peep along the wood-path, and breathe their fragrance from among the withered leaves.

I remember, too, the faded butterfly, flitting about the wood-shed roof. His wings were torn and jagged at their edges, and their feathery beauty had nearly all been left among last summer’s flowers. Warned by November frosts, he had sought his winter shelter in some chink or crevice among the loosened boards, where, benumbed and dormant, he had spent the winter, awaiting the warmth of the returning sun to thaw him out, and once more coax him into the outer world. As early as February, should the day be mild, he would come out of his mysterious concealment and bask in the warm sunshine. Presently he alights upon the end of a birch-log in the wood-pile, and sips the sweet exuding sap. He is soon joined by another, and another, until a swarm has gathered at the feast. As the day declines, they retire again to the wood-shed, and there, huddled together on the rafters, await their next opportunity of mild and sunny weather. Even in a January thaw I have seen one of these faded butterflies that had left his hiding-place to tantalize a troop of hens around the barn-yard door.

I remember the torrent of rain and the freshet; the broken dams and bridges washed away. The softened ground yielded up its subterranean frosts; in all the trees the winter wounds bled with the quickened pulse; the elder spigots in the sugar-maples trickled all the day; and the neighboring farms echoed with the snap of whip and voice of eager teamsters, as the busy plough turned the dark-brown furrows, or the crushing harrow combed the crumbling mould. How welcome were the evidences of returning life among the low meadow-lands, where velvety-green tufts of sprouting grass circled the borders of the marshy pools, and the golden willow twigs bathed the brook-side in a luminous glow! Here, too, the alders hung their swinging tassels or trailed them o’er the surface of the swollen stream.

One by one the feathered flocks returned, and the little snow-birds and the buntings, seeing their place usurped, left for the northward region, to lend their cheerful voices to another winter. Then came a beautiful day, with mild, earth-scented breezes, like very spring. But at night the north wind came again to reassert its power, and the earth was once more subdued beneath the snow. And so for weeks the north wind battled with the sun,

Till at last the sweet Arbutus
Nestling close on Nature’s breast
Felt a throb · a warm pulsation
Rouse it from its dreamy rest·

Throwing wide its little portals
From its coverlet of snow
It peeped forth from the leafy shelter
Into a valley white below·

“Am I dreaming? · Shall the Winter
Stifle and freeze my early breath
Nay · hark! · I hear the Bluebird singing
’Spring has come’ he answereth·

“Ah! Frost-flower in thy grotto yonder
Crystal sun-gem white and clear
Thy reign must cease when I awaken
Farewell! pale bloom · thy fate draws near·

Bleak Winter is thine
Love’s Spring-time is mine·

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PASTORAL DAYS; OR, MEMORIES OF A NEW ENGLAND YEAR ***

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