

## XII.

ONCE more in the forest, after a lapse of two years, yet it is a different section from that with which I have been familiar. The haunts of the deer we are disturbing now are far removed from the Beaverkill, and the once hospitable cabin of "Uncle Josh." As somewhat of his history, and our acquaintance with the old hunter, has been chronicled on former pages, we will not recur to them now. Suffice it to say, that where his lonely clearing broke the gloom of the forest, a village with more pretending, but less verdure-shaded dwellings than his, is now growing and thriving.

The waters of the Beaverkill, once so swift and silvery, have been dammed up for utilitarian purposes, and are discolored by the various uses they are made to serve. Uncle Josh, that honest old man and true-hearted hunter, has passed away, with most of that race which followed so closely the footsteps of the receding red man.

One of the friends who so humorously chronicled the sayings and doings of those our pristine hunting days is gone too, and Pilot, his faithful hound, so

swift of foot, so keen of scent, has long ago followed his last chase.

The features of the country which surrounds us now, are not unlike those which the waters of the Shohokin and the Beaverkill mirror on their way to the infant Delaware; yet here, the mountains are grander, and the wilderness is more unbroken. Countless lakes, of varied size and form, lie like gems amidst the densely wooded hills and surrounding forests.

Our rude cabin is on the shore of one of them, overshadowed by swaying spruces and sighing pines, The "Silver Mountain" and "Owl's Head" cast their long shadows athwart its calm bosom, whilst behind them, old "Bluebeard," his top white with early snows, towers grandly above its surrounding hills.

Not many miles to the north is the noble St. Lawrence and the Canadian boundary. To the south are the Adirondack mountains with their lofty peaks of Tahawus and Seward, looking down upon the Saranac lakes, which stretch like a silvery chain through miles and miles of wilderness.

To those who never traversed this part of the State, it is difficult to imagine what wild wastes cover the greater parts of the Counties of Hamilton, Clinton, Essex, Franklin and St. Lawrence.

And so they will remain for years to come, whilst the rich and unencumbered prairie lands of the west

tempt the settler with their more fertile soil and salubrious climate.

From the rude cabin, in which I am striving to indite these records, to the nearest post-town, it is twelve miles, half of which we came afoot through the forest.

Two active, muscular guides carried our provisions in sacks slung over their shoulders, whilst we trudged after them with no heavier burden than our rifles. Our clothes are stout and warm, and our feet well shod, for the path, scarcely discernible, lies over swamps, and streams, and fallen timber, to say nothing of the snow, which covers the ground, in places, to the depth of several inches.

It was nearly night of our second day from home, when we reached the shore of Indian lake, our destination. Hemmed in by densely wooded hills, and veiled from sight by the spruces and hemlocks which fringe its margin, we were upon the beach before we were aware of its proximity.

Nothing impressed me so much as the utter loneliness and seclusion of the place. The shadows of the mountains lying on the water, the old forest with its immense trunks, some dead and bearded with swaying moss, and above all, the mournful cry of the loon, echoing from the opposite shore, increased the awe which those who love such scenes must always feel, and especially at such an hour.

As I looked upon the forest surrounding us, dark and dim, these stanzas from *Evangeline* came into my memory—

“This is the forest primeval; the murmuring pines and the hemlocks,  
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,  
Stand like Druids of old, with voices sad and prophetic,  
Stand like harpers hoar with beards that rest on their bosoms.”

A ruinous shanty of boughs open to the south, with the smouldering ashes of a fire before it, offered us a shelter; but a storm seemed brewing, and our guides advised our taking the skiff which was moored here and going a mile down the lake to a settler's more comfortable cabin. This we agreed to, and having packed in our luggage we put out from shore, one of the men having concluded to build a fire and remain in the shanty till we rejoined him in the morning.

Our oarsman had not rowed us far before he perceived in the distant water, what appeared, by the dim light of evening, to be the wake of a swimming deer. Our rifles were loaded, and we started in pursuit; but after rowing half-way across the lake, much to our disappointment we found it was made by a flock of ducks, which dived away from us on a nearer approach.

Our course was then laid for the clearing, which

was a mile and a half distant, but we soon found our boat to be leaking so badly, it was necessary to put to shore and turn out the water.

We found an old pan at the shanty, where Tom had made himself so comfortable, and were almost persuaded to remain and keep him company; but we again started, though it required constant bailing to keep our craft afloat. We took turns at the service till we reached the clearing, cold, wet, and hungry, after a day's hard travel.

It was now dark, and the approach to the cabin lay over burnt and fallen timber, heaped up in every imaginable form, the *débris* of what is called in forest parlance, a "slash."

With climbing, scrambling, and tumbling for nearly half an hour, we at last reached the house and found not only a warm welcome but a warm supper awaiting us; for our arrival at the lake that night was not unlooked for, and with the foresight natural to his calling, the hunter had predicted we would not pass the night at the shanty.

Our supper of venison and sundry accompaniments was discussed with hearty relish; and afterward, with feet toasting before the roaring fire, we passed an hour or two in "deer and dog" talk, and of our plans for the morrow.

Ellis, our host, was a whole-souled, cheerful fellow,

and withal, intelligent. Our shelter was built of logs, rude, yet comfortable enough in moderate weather, for two small rooms were all that it contained, and they were kitchen, bed-room, living room and all. Here the old settler had lived for years with a wife and a growing family of children: the nearest neighbor four miles distant through the forest and the nearest town eight miles farther. To us, used as we are to the social intercourse of communities, it is a marvel how men can live so isolated, unless they are misanthropic, or are compelled to through necessity, which was not the case in this instance.

Yet I have seen in the wilderness, a woman who had not looked upon one of her sex for eight years, nearly one-third of her lifetime. With her, it was necessity at first, but after awhile this begot indifference, and she was happy in her seclusion. What a blank seems such an existence!

Among the hunters and loggers who here and there inhabit this northern wilderness, one often finds men of mind and manners which seem at utter variance with their situation and calling.

Some of them have seen better days; but either soured by disappointments or adventurous in their tastes, have adopted that mode of life. Regardless of our conventionalities they meet you as a *man*, with a

hearty grasp of the hand and a welcome, if you will take it "rough and tumble" with them.

A man who cannot follow them through the woods, or ford a stream if it crosses the path, or eat out of the same dish and drink out of the same bottle, gets very little sympathy from them.

Their motto is, "take it as you get it," and my own experience has taught me it is the only comfortable plan. So in their camps they all find the same social level: fraternization and "solidarity," as Kossuth has it, are the chief elements of their happiness and success.

"And the strongest of hand is highest in rank,  
The boldest is first of the band."

We were up before day-break in the morning, and sat down to a breakfast of pork and venison, stewed cranberries, bread and green tea; you rarely taste coffee in the woods. Our meal finished, we again essayed the "slash" on our way to the boats. This time the passage over it was not so difficult, for Ellis had his private path, which was nothing more than adroit jumping from one log to another where they lay a little more smoothly and scattered.

After frequent journeys over the obstacle during the time we were thereabout, the hurdle jumpings at the

Hippodrome rather fell in my estimation. They were nothing to our display of agility.

As we expected to drive the deer into the lake, which, by the way, is a mode of sport I do not like, inasmuch as the game are out of their element, one of the hunters, Tom, who had been at the shanty all night, took the dogs some two miles back from the lake to start a deer, whilst we, each in a boat, rowed for our appointed stations on the opposite shore.

My stand was nearly at the extreme end, so I had a pull of some two miles to reach it.

It was a lovely day, hazy and warm, the first of the Indian summer. The water lay smooth and glassy, save when a passing breeze rippled its surface.

The glorious mountains environing it, the sombre pines, and tall swaying spruces, the lofty tamaracks, and graceful hemlocks—all mirrored to a line in the clear, deep water; there was but one thing wanting—the bloom and verdure of summer.

A row of some twenty minutes brought me to my station, where I moored my skiff to the trunk of a hemlock and stepped ashore.

It was an out-jutting point, covered with a dense spruce thicket, except where it had been cut away to give room for a fire, which here we are always at liberty to kindle. From it I could see the whole

expanse of the lake, and also my companions on their stands, half a mile and a mile from me.

I selected a spot where I could sit unseen from the opposite shore, and listened for the yell of the hounds when a deer should be started.

No sound broke the perfect stillness, save now and then the quack of a duck or the cry of the northern diver far out in the lake. An hour passed, before I caught the first faint bay of "Dash," the hound that generally took the lead. He was a mile away, coursing along the side of a mountain, between which and the steep shore of the lake, there lay a deep valley. By the undulations of his voice, I could tell the nature of the ground over which he was chasing; now seeming farther off as they took the low ground; now louder and nearer as they gained some ridge-top, till his yell opened like a trumpet on the summit of the ridge nearest me. I almost held my breath waiting for the deer to strike the shore, for the dog appeared to be making for a point nearly opposite me.

A moment more, and over a fallen pine tree that lay along the steep bank, a noble buck leaping into the lake, throwing the water up into spray as he bounded forward. Though a quarter of a mile from me, I could hear his rapid strokes and labored breathing as he made for the shore on which I stood. A few minutes more, and it would be time for me to take my

boat and strive to cut him off from the shore, or drive him down the lake. But I was disappointed; for not hearing the dogs after him, and the water being cold, he turned back again. It was too long a shot for any probability of hitting him, so I watched him regain the woods and dash off unharmed. At noon we all met, according to signal, at the brush shanty, where, reclining on odorous hemlock boughs around a well piled fire, we enjoyed our simple luncheon preparatory to another row and afternoon stand. But one more deer, which I did not see, but my nearer companion did, came to the lake that day; and sundown found us once more displaying our agility upon the sinuous "slash" path that led to Ellis's cabin.

That evening we listened to the story which gave the "Silver mountain" its euphonious title.

Even here in the wilderness, men have become the dupes of cunning speculators, and the victims of a wild belief in clairvoyance and the mysteries of the "dark stone."

The story is in this wise, and its incidents date but a few months back. A French hunter, in his tramps through the forest, found a stone flecked with shining particles resembling silver. His apparent good fortune was soon confided to a few of his trusty brethren, and having sent some fifty miles for a man who pretended to see far down in the earth by the aid of magic rods,

magician's stone, and other like creations, their search for the mine commenced. With the aid of a conniving female medium, the imposter pointed out the exact spot where the vein could be struck with very little boring. Expensive tools were made and carried with much labor six miles through the wilderness. Cabins were built, and provisions stored regardless of expense, for the miners were sanguine of soon amassing great wealth. By and by, great blasts were made, awakening the solitudes far and near, and days and weeks of constant and expensive toil were rewarded with not even the promise of success. The bubble at last burst; the magnetizer and his accomplice decamped with their ill-gotten gains, and ere long the miners, one by one, dropped away from the camp, laden not with ore, but with dearly-bought experience.

Thenceforth the mountain at whose base the mine was supposed to be, and which was nameless before, has borne its present title, and will bear it for ever. Those who were beguiled in that futile research after hidden treasures, never or seldom speak of their operations—it is a forbidden subject—but it would take a very shrewd "professor" to beguile them again.

Two days more were spent on and about the lake, but either from the coldness of the water or the frequency with which they had been hunted that season, the deer avoided the lake when started by the

dogs, and took another direction toward the Salmon river or the Horse Shoe pond, some miles distant.

Our hunters advised hunting on "run-ways," and we, hoping for better luck, assented. Once more our luggage was bagged and shouldered, and we started on a five-mile tramp. Forging half-frozen streams on foot, or crossing them on slippery logs—wading oozy swamps—threading pathless woods, and climbing steep ridges, noon found us on the ground, four miles from the nearest habitation.

Our first stands were on the crest of a lofty ridge which was attained from the river's level with arduous climbing. Before reaching its base, we could see nothing before or around us but dense thickets, spruce and alder; yet, following our guide closely, and struggling through intertwined branches and over fallen logs, we commenced ascending.

Patiently, and breathlessly almost, we climbed on, stopping now and then to recruit our lungs, and wondering how far we were from the summit.

At length we came into the more open timber of beech and maple which crowned the ridge.

Deer tracks were abundant on every side, and the sight of them alone inspirited us.

One of the hunters assigned us our stands, near which the deer would run, if started, towards the river, whose waters washed the base of the hill on the oppo-

site side to that from which we had come. Great quiet and watchfulness are requisite in this mode of hunting, though to many it is by far the pleasantest plan, but most fatiguing on account of so much walking from one section to another.

My stand was by a fallen pine tree that lay upon the brow of the ridge, from which the descent to the river was over a thousand feet, yet not very steep. The view of the country beneath me and far away to the south and west, was worth a day's travel.

The rapid stream, winding with short and graceful curves through the low land and forest till lost to view—the vast stretch of wilderness, with no clearing or habitation in sight—the distant ridges with their sides of evergreen timber, and beyond them the higher peaks of the Adirondacks, capped with snow; combined to form a landscape I thought could rarely be surpassed.

But soon the rifle of the hunter who had charge of the dogs told us that a deer was started. In a few minutes the faint bay of the hounds came up over the ridge, now louder, now almost unheard, till it died away in the distance. That deer was lost to us, for he went round the ridge, instead of across it.

The day was waning, and we had four miles to walk, besides the river to cross, on our nearest route to a shelter; but before joining my companions, I thought I would shoot a partridge that sat drumming

on a log a few rods from me. As I carefully walked forward, a deer, which had probably been lying in her bed not far off, and roused by my footsteps, sprang with tremendous bounds down the hillside for the river below. Through the dense timber I caught for a moment a fair view of her going from me, and I fired, but with little hope of reaching her.

She staggered, however, and fell, but rose again with a broken leg dangling uselessly in her flight.

Following quickly on her track to where the view was more open, I stood and watched her tripod race to the bottom of the slope. She plunged into the stream and swam across, regaining the opposite shore, and clumsily leaping some fallen timber that lay upon the bank, disappeared in the forest. My shot had brought my companions to me, and with one of the dogs, which had come in, the hunters started in pursuit. It was not long before Dash caught the wounded animal, as its pitiful and quavering bleat announced. The men, following the sounds, came up in time to give it the finishing stroke, and soon returned to us waiting by the river bank, bearing the deer. As it was getting late and dark, the question arose how we were to get it out of the woods; but these hunters are never in a dilemma. One of them proposed to make a raft of logs and float down the river with it to the fording place, two miles below, where we were to

cross. The raft, bound together with withes, was soon made, and Tom on it, floating quickly down the stream. Our return path was nearly the one by which we had come, but doubly intricate on account of the darkness; but an half hour's walk brought us to the ford, where Tom was awaiting us with his raft, ready to ferry us over. His small and slippery craft would support but two at a time, so one by one, we were ferried over and landed without any mishap, except an unlucky slip of one of us into the river, where the water was waist deep and icy cold. Shouldering the deer, our guides led the way, and an hour's walk brought us to a comfortable cabin beneath the shadow of a mountain by the river bank. That night we sat long by the great, crackling fire, listening to tales of sport and danger from our hardy companions, who little thought there was a "chiel among them taking notes."

## XIII.

THE last night we had spent at the lake was one of storm and tumult: such a night as made the cabin of Ellis a shelter not to be despised.

All the day, the near mountain tops had been wreathed by heavy mists, which at intervals came down before the sleet-laden gusts, enveloping the forest and the lake in vapory shrouds.

We had found it difficult to keep our fires ablaze upon our stands that stormy noon, and as the chance of driving a deer to water seemed rather doubtful, our spirits and the weather were well nigh congenial. It was to be our last *rendezvous* at the shanty, and as we pulled our skiffs ashore under the drooping hemlocks, which the clear, cold waters, over which they hung, mirrored so perfectly, I stood for a moment to indulge the reflections which the scene engendered.

Here and there upon the opposite shore, the blue smoke of our untended fires was curling gracefully upward and mingling with the white mist that lay along the tree-tops and the hillsides. A log canoe, with shattered side, which a wandering Indian had