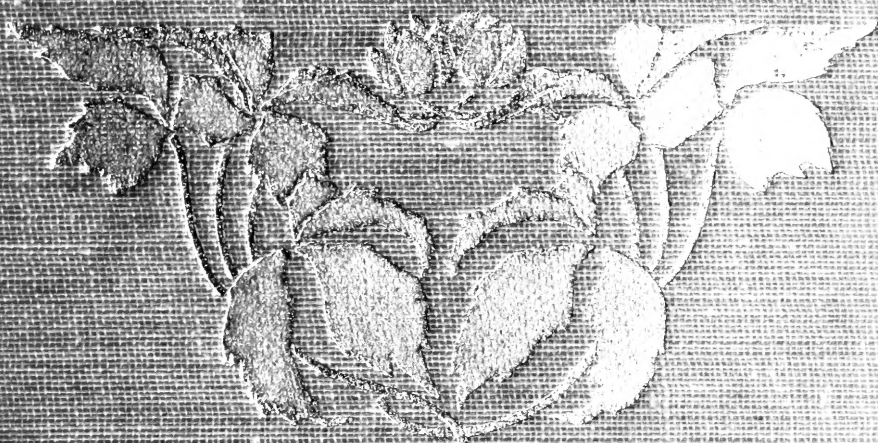


SILVER-FIELDS



ROWLAND E. ROBINSON

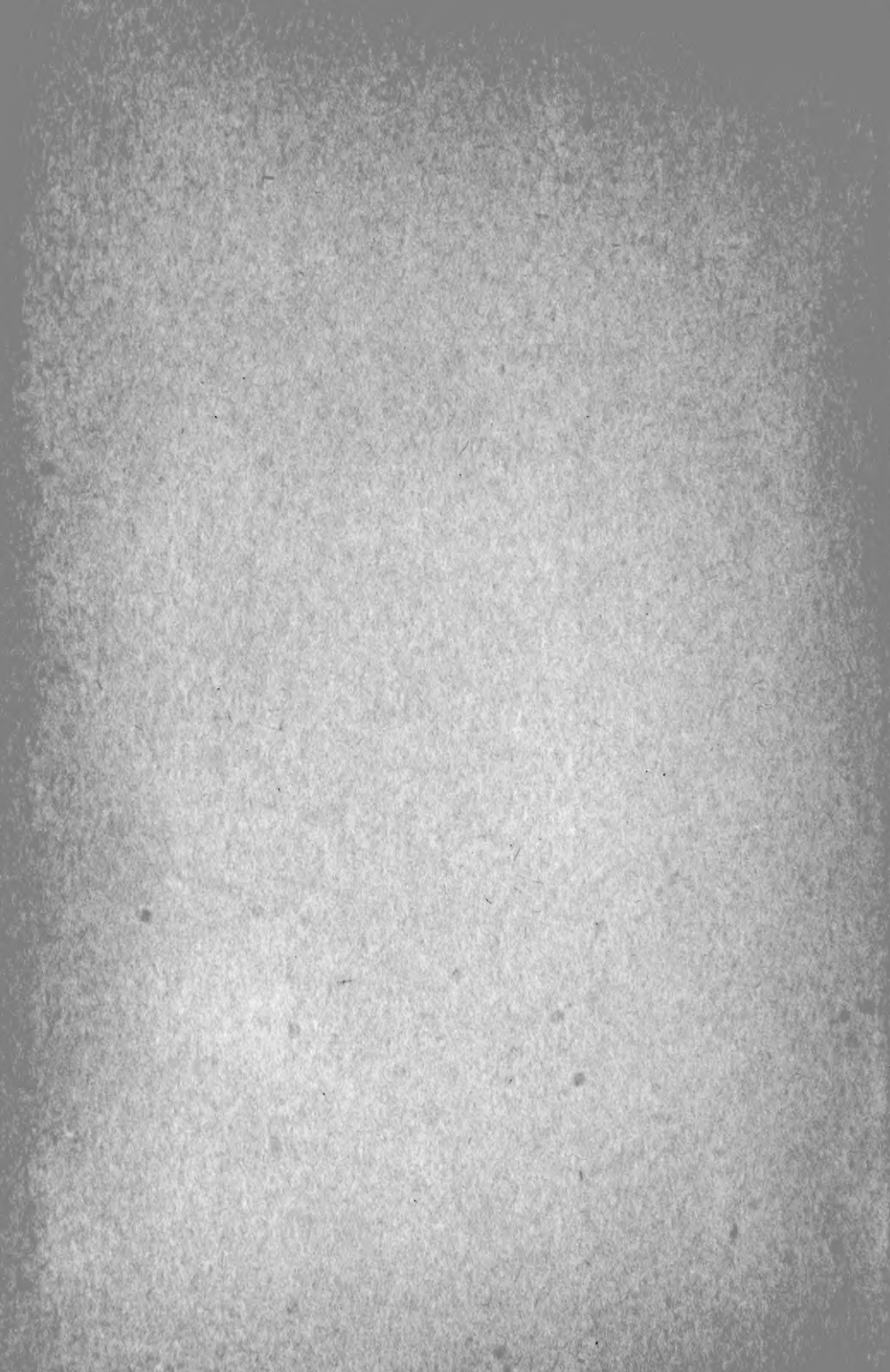


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SILVER FIELDS
AND OTHER SKETCHES OF
A FARMER-SPORTSMAN



SILVER FIELDS

AND OTHER SKETCHES OF
A FARMER-SPORTSMAN

BY

ROWLAND E. ROBINSON

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"In New England Fields and Woods," etc.*



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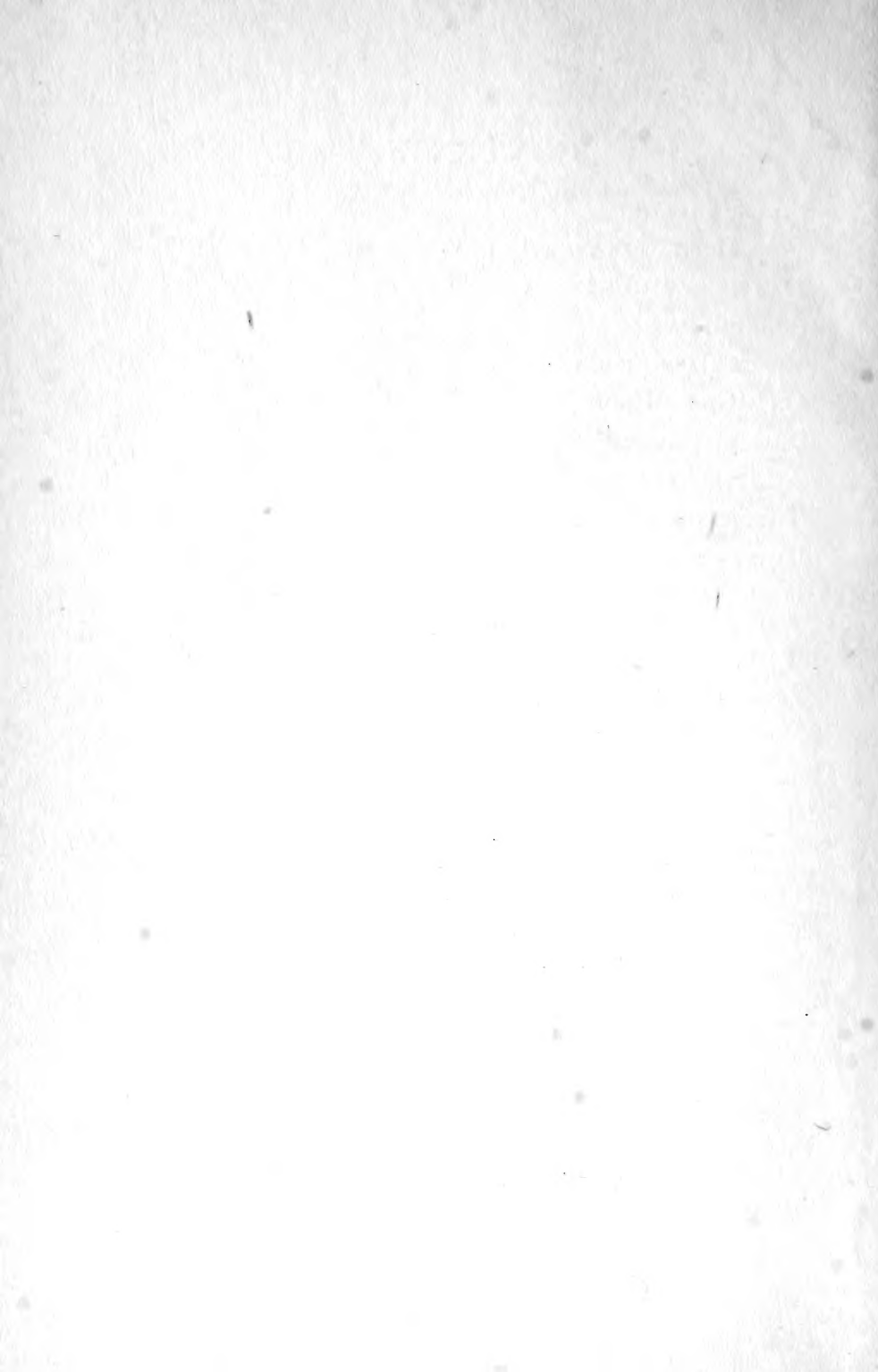
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SILVER FIELDS
AND OTHER SKETCHES OF
A FARMER-SPORTSMAN

SILVER FIELDS

AFTER many downfalls of snow by night and day, everything of lesser height and sheer uprightness than buildings and trees is buried in universal whiteness. Sometimes the snow flutters down and silently alights like immense flocks of birds. At other times it descends as silently, but like the continuous falling of a gray veil shutting one in from all the world lying farther away than his nearest outbuildings. Another snowfall comes blown by howling winds in long slants to the earth and whirled and tossed along the fields blurring their surface in a frozen crust.

Then comes a day when the wind quits buffeting the snow from this side and that and stands still, debating which way it shall blow next, while the sun burns into the cold blue sky's eastern rim, runs its short course over the dazzling northern fields, and burns its way out behind the glorified western mountains. When the sun is highest the air bites cheeks and nose and fingers with a sharp chill, and one feels its teeth gnawing his toes through his boots if he does not bestir them. At nightfall the smoke of the chimneys leans toward the North Star and by the next morning the wind comes roaring up from the south, armed with

swords and spears of cold that no armor of wool or fur can ward off, and from every vantage-ground of ridge and drift stream the white banners of snow. Then clouds come drifting across the sky, first a few, then so many that they get into a jam against some star or mountain somewhere to the northward, and in a few hours all the blue is clogged with a dull gray mass. As the later coming legions of the wind arrive, the temper of their weapons is softened and their keen edge blunted. The snow loses its crispness and takes the imprint of a foot like wax.

We have a midwinter thaw, the traditional January thaw a little belated; and presently it begins to rain pellets of lead out of the leaden sky, rain that has none of the pleasant sounds of summer showers. There is no merry patter on the snow-covered roof, no lively clatter on intercepting green leaves nor splashes of dimpled pools; only windows and weather-boards resound to its sullen beat. When, after some hours of rainfall, the snow has become softened down to the earth, so that when one walks in it his tracks show a gray, compacted slush at the bottom, the wind lulls and veers to the northward and patches of blue are opened in the world's low, opaque roof, windows through which the sun shines upon some fields and mountain peaks, making them whiter than the whiteness of snow.

The air grows colder, coming out of the north; but if the advance of Boreas is slow and cautious, and he sends before him his light-armed skirmishers, the snow is frozen so gradually that it turns to a crumbly, loose mass, with a thin, treacherous surface, where nothing much heavier than a fox, if not as broadly shod as with snowshoes, may go without vexatious and most tiresome labor. If the change of temperature is sharp and sudden enough to freeze the water held in the snow before it has time to leach down to the earth, we are given a crust so firm that it is a delight to coasters and all walkers and runners on the snow.

It is now no toil but a pleasure to go across lots. "The longest way round" is not now "the shortest way home." The fields give better footing than the highways. The side of the highways is pleasanter to the feet than the two grooves the horses and sleighs have worn in its center in all their two months' going and coming. There is a silver stile along every rod of every fence, and you may walk anywhere over the buried gray wall or rail fence at your ordinary pace, and sit down to rest on the top of the stakes where last July, when the daisies were blowing, the bobolink sang, higher than you could reach. Can it be that summer ever blossomed here in these frozen fields? How long ago it seems; and yet we are not much older!

When the full moon comes pulsing up behind the evergreen-crested hill, with the black silhouette of a pine slowly sliding down its yellow disk, trunk, dry limb, and bristling branch clear-cut against it, and slowly draws toward it the long blue shadows, it is no time to bide within doors. In every cold night of the year that gives many such to us Northern folk we may have fire-side and lamplight at some price, but not for love nor money many times in a winter such a night as this, such warmth out of snow and frost, such celestial light shed on silver-paved fields. Let us set our faces toward the moon and trail our shadows behind us till we lose them among the shadows of the pines and hemlocks of Shellhouse Mountain.

Solid and appetizing food is this firm crust for our feet! How they devour the way with crunching bites, reminding our teeth of the loaf sugar of youthful days when the snowy cones, swathed in the purple paper that our mothers used for the concoction of dyestuff, tempted us to theft. What better wine than this still, sharp air!

The even, smooth surface of the snow has been preserved; it is not pitted, nor in places cut into fleecy texture as the sun and wind of March carves it sometimes. The dark blue shadows of the tree-trunks lie clear-edged upon it, not jagged and toothed as when they fall on grass ground. Every

branch's shadow lies blue-veined upon it, every mesh of twigs is netted more distinctly there than the substance is against the sky, the torn bird's nest and every wind-forgotten leaf are revealed on the white surface.

A winged phantom startles us gliding across the silver field just before us, as swift in its flight but not more noiseless than the great owl it attends. Owl and shadow dissolve in the distant blue and white, and presently, when this spirit of the night has regained his woodland haunt, his hollow, storm-foreboding hoot is heard resounding through the dark aisles of the forest.

All sounds are at one with the hour and season. The snow crust cracks in long but almost imperceptible fissures, the ice settles to the galling level of the brooks and ponds with a sudden resonant crash, the frozen trees snap like the ineffectual primers of an ambushed foe. All are winter's voices, as ancient as hoary winter's self, that only emphasize the silence out of which they break. The jingle of the sleigh-bells along a distant road, the crunching of our footsteps, and their sharp short echoes, are the only sounds that betoken any human presence in all the wide glittering expanse, with its blotches of woodland and dots of sleeping farmsteads.

We are not the first explorers here. A fox has left the record of his wanderings, exaggerated like

many another traveler's accounts of himself writ on a more enduring page than this, for if you will believe this fellow's tracks made before the thaw, he was as big as a wolf, and formidable enough to raise a hue and cry in the township against him. The hare might be frightened to see the print of his own pads, now grown as big as the tracks of his enemy, the lynx. A skunk was warmed up into such activity as his short legs could compass and made his mark in the soft snow, unmistakable, though almost big enough for the track of the mephitic monster of the Wabanakee legend; the rows of four footmarks printed diagonally athwart his course when he cantered abroad from his burrow are none but his, whereto is added proof of his sometime presence in a spicy waft of the air. The regular parallel dots of the weasel's track make a great show where he came to the surface above his regular runway along the buried fence. He and the fox, though unseen, are as wide awake this cold night as ever, but they and all later travelers are modest now, and set down naught of their journeys.

Can it be that there were giants here so lately as a month ago when the woodchopper went this way to his work! Here are his monstrous footprints, albeit the stride is short, and there he set his huge axe, before which the trees should have gone down like mullein stalks, and there he set

his caldron of a dinner pail while he lighted his pipe. How could so small a blaze as that little burned-out match afforded, ever have fired his furnace of a pipe! Yet from these dropped fragments of home-grown tobacco, I conclude that our giant was only an ordinary little Frenchman whose feet caught the trick of his tongue.

The packed snow resisted the thaw more than that which lay as it fell, so that beaten paths that were sunk below the surface are raised causeways now, a narrow, slippery footing that no one tries with all this wide pavement to choose from.

Now if we might have the luck to see a fox, how well his furry form, clad for such weather, so agile, noiseless, and wild, would fit the scene, and we ought to see one, for this little basin, rimmed with the rough hills on the east side and on the others with low ridges, is a favorite spot with foxes, a trysting-place at this love-making season and a hunting-ground in spring, summer, and fall, when the tall wild grass harbors many field mice. Moreover, Reynard often gets a free lunch here, for hardly a year goes by that, to save the trouble of burial, a dead horse or cow is not hauled to this out-of-the-way spot where foxes, skunks, and crows find cheap and speedy sepulture for everything but the bones. It was undoubtedly the bed of a little pond two or three hundred years ago and the home of beavers or in some such way, of account

to the Indians, for on the southwest bank are to be found plenty of flint chips of the old arrow-makers. Only a little brook trickles through it now, complaining with a faint, muffled whimper under its concave glare of shell ice, of its diminished strength and babbling in a feeble voice of the days when it brawled bravely over the stones into the pond all the droughtiest summer through and tumbled down the rocks below it with incessant clatter.

Hush! Stand stock still, breathe softly and whisper no louder, for there, just out of the shadows of the hill, sits a fox bolt upright and alert. A stump? Nonsense! No wood nor stone untouched by the hand of the most cunning carver ever had such lifelike form, such expression of alertness. You can see, if your eyes are sharp enough, the slight motion of his ears as he pricks them toward us, as his nose points, for he has seen or heard, not smelled, us; for the light breeze sets from him to us, and, I fancy, touches our nostrils with a faint waft of his pungent odor. You can see the curve of his back, his fluffy brush lying along the snow — nearly make out the white tip of it. The ruddiness of his coat almost shows, but moonlight is a poor revealer of color; the pines are not green, as we know they are, but black, and everything is black or blue, or gray or white. Now he moves his head a little. He is growing

more and more suspicious and presently will vanish like a swift shadow in the shadow of the woods. Shall we send him off with a shout or try how near he will let us come? Then step carefully and slowly. How steadfast he stands, though we have lessened by half the distance that lay between us when we first saw him. He must have an appointment here with the most bewitching vixen in all fox society, and will not budge till he must. How does the wise scamp know that our guns are at home? Or has he not heard or seen us yet, all his looking and listening being for the coming of his mistress? Has love made him blind and deaf to all enemies but the maiden of his heart? Try with a mouse squeak if he cannot be moved by an appeal to his stomach. Stock still yet! Confound his impudence or his unvulpine stupidity. Salute him with a yell that shall make the moonlit night more hideous to him than the glare of noon with a hundred hounds baying behind him. The shadowy hill and the black pines behind us toss back and forth the echoes of such an infernal uproar as has not stirred them since Indians and the "Indian devil" were here. Our fox is paralyzed with fright, actually frozen with fear. Let us rush upon him and secure him before the blood starts again in his veins. Well, it is a stump after all! But were ever mortals played a worse trick by a real fox?

It is something out of common experience to go into the woods in the night-time without stumbling over roots, logs, or bushes and groping in constant fear of bringing up against a tree. No danger now of bumping against trees that show as plainly as in a summer day. The undergrowth is bent down and snugly packed under the hard crust, and brush heaps are bridged with it, and trunks of fallen trees are faintly marked by slight ridges that one walks over almost without knowing it. The partridge could not find his drumming-log now if he wanted it, as he will not for six weeks to come. Sad is his fate if he was caught napping under the snow when this crust made, but that, I think, seldom happens to him, though often to the poor quail in this region of deep snows. Sixty years ago quail were not uncommon here where now a wild turkey would scarcely be a stranger sight. Such crusts as these have been their more relentless enemy than guns and snares or beasts and birds of prey, and have exterminated them.

The partridge does not harbor under the snow except in cold, dry weather, though he allows himself to be covered by snowfalls. One may often see the mould of his plump body where he has lain for hours in his snug bed of down, and rarely — twice, or thrice in a lifetime, perhaps — one may have the luck to be startled by his sudden

apparition, bursting from the unsuspected, even whiteness of the wood's soft carpet. In mild winter weather he is aloft where his food is or is embroidering the yielding snow with his pretty footprints. Here is some of his work done a week ago, now frayed out at the edges by the thaw, but it has the mark of his own pattern, unmistakable, even in this moonlight, very different from the clumsy track of civilized poultry. It runs this way and that, sometimes doubling on itself, and disappears in the pallid gloom of an evergreen thicket, where perhaps is his roosting-place.

The floor of the woods is barred and netted with an intricate maze of blue shadows, here and there splashed with a great blot of shade where the branches of a hemlock intercept the moonlight.

How still it is! Even the harps of the pines are silent, and our ears are hungry for some other sound than our own breathing and the crunch of our footsteps. Imagine them suddenly filled with the scream of a panther, stealthily creeping on our track unsuspected, unseen, unheard, till he splits the silence with his devilish yell. But they tell us now that the panther is voiceless, and the tales that thrilled our childhood with an ecstasy of delightful terror, of our grandfathers being led into the woods by the catamount's cry, like that of a woman in distress, were myths — our good old grandfathers were liars or they were fools,

“brought up in the woods to be scared by owls.” But the panther may be here, for there are panthers in Vermont yet, or at least there was one, two or three years ago, when on a Thanksgiving Day two little Green Mountain boys, partridge-hunting in Barnard, came upon a monster crouching in a thicket of black growth, and a doughty grown-up Green Mountain boy killed him at short range with a well-delivered charge of BB shot. When I was a boy there was always a panther prowling about this mountain in huckleberry-time, guarding the berries for the two or three old berry-pickers who used to tell us of hearing his fearful cries. He performed his duty well, as far as concerned us youngsters. When the berry season was over he departed and was heard no more till next summer.

A sheer wall of rock bars our further way up the mountain in this direction. An ice cascade, silent as all its surroundings, not the trickle of the smallest rill of snow water to be heard in its core, veils a portion of the black steep with dull silver, bur-nished here and there with a moon-glint.

Let us sound a retreat and set our faces toward the gray steeps of Split Rock Mount and the piled-up blue and white Adirondacks, and get back on the silver fields, brighter than ever now. As we march abreast of our northward slanting shadows, with the moon now well up above the world, we

fancy that a part of this northern half of the earth outshines her.

Silver fields is not a good enough name tonight for these shining farms, for the creek unmarked now but by the fringe of wooded banks, nor for the broad lake quiet under ice and snow, but never when tossed by autumnal storms so white as now and scarcely brighter when in the glare of the summer sun. If you have a newly minted silver coin in your pocket, cast it before you and see how dull a dot it is on the surface. It would hearten a greenbacker to see how poor a show the precious metal makes to look at, hardly worth picking up out of acres of brighter riches that rust doth not corrupt and that shall be stolen by no meaner thief than the sun, the south wind, and the rain. The roofs of gray old homesteads outshine the lights in the windows, and we wonder if any of the inmates are aware how royally their houses are tiled. Doubtless not one of them thinks of it, or, if at all, only as protecting the pine shingles from the sparks of the rousing winter fires, or as so much filling for the cistern when the next thaw comes; nor, as compared with it, do the interiors, the low, whitewashed ceilings, rag carpets, creaking splint-bottomed chairs and deal furniture, seem mean to them or unfitting their fine, perishable covering. For ourselves, we begin to entertain more kindly thoughts of such indoor

homeliness and desire the comforts of its harboring, and presently shut ourselves in from the blue sky and shining moonlit outer world, tired and content to smoke a restful pipe by the fireside.

FOX-HUNTING IN NEW ENGLAND

IN New England and some of the Northern and Middle States, the fox is hunted with two or three hounds, or oftener with only one, the hunter going on foot and armed with a shot-gun or rifle, his method being to shoot the fox as it runs before the hounds. The sport is exciting, invigorating, and manly, and by its votaries is esteemed the chief of field sports. The fox is proverbially the most cunning of beasts, often eluding by his tricks the most expert hunter and the truest hounds. Long walks are required, which take one over many miles of woods, hills, and fields; and this in fall and winter when the air is always pure and bracing. I have noticed that many who delight to shoot the hare or the deer before the hounds, are accustomed to scoff at this sport, which indeed is generally held in contempt by those who arrogate to themselves the title of "true sportsmen."

It is difficult to see wherein it is more unsportsmanlike to hunt before hounds an animal of such self-possession and such varied cunning, that it is continually putting its pursuers at fault, when it *is* sportsmanlike to hunt in like manner animals who have each, speed failing, only a trick apiece

— the hare depending on its doublings to elude the dogs, the deer on running to water.

The reason for this nice distinction lies, perhaps, in that deference to English usage which still exists among us. In this case it is most senseless, for even if fox-hunting in English fashion were practicable here, it would not be tolerated by our farmers, who would never endure the trampling of their cultivated fields and the destruction of the fences by a score or more hard-riding horsemen. But it is not practicable, for no horse could possibly follow the course of the hounds and fox among our hills and mountains, where the chase often leads up declivities to be surmounted only by the stanchest and most active hounds, and through thick forests and almost impassable swamps.

In New England the hunt is for the red fox and his varieties, the silver and cross foxes. The gray fox of the South and West is almost, if not quite, unknown. From the tip of his nose to the root of his tail, the red fox measures about twenty-eight or thirty inches, his tail sixteen to eighteen inches including hair, and his height at the shoulders thirteen inches. His long fur and thick, bushy tail make him look larger and heavier than he is. Of several specimens which I have weighed, the largest tipped the beam at twelve pounds; the least at seven pounds. The general color is yellow-

ish red; the outsides of the ears and the fronts of the legs and feet are black; the chin and usually the tip of the tail, white; and the tail darker than the body, most of its hairs being tipped with black. The eyes are near together and strongly express, as does the whole head, the alert and cunning nature of the animal.

The cross fox, much scarcer than the red, is very beautiful. It is thus described by Thompson; "A blackish stripe passing from the neck down the back and another crossing it at right angles over the shoulders; sides, ferruginous, running into gray on the back; the chin, legs, and under parts of the body black, with a few hairs tipped with white; upper side of the tail, gray; under side and parts of the body adjacent, pale yellow; tail tipped with white. The cross upon the shoulders is not always apparent, even in specimens which, from the fineness of the fur, are acknowledged to be cross foxes. Size the same as the common fox."

The black or silver fox is so rare in New England that to see one is the event of a lifetime. The variety is as beautiful and valuable as rare. Its color is sometimes entirely of a shining black, except the white tip of the tail, but oftener of a silvery hue, owing to an intermixture of hairs tipped with white. It has probably always been uncommon here, for it is said to have been held in such estimation by the Indians of this region,

that a silver fox-skin was equal in value to forty beaver-skins, and the gift of one was considered a sacred pledge. One often hears of silver foxes being seen, but, like the big fish so often lost by anglers, they almost invariably get away.

Foxes are less rare in settled countries and on the borders of civilization than in the wilderness, for, though they find no fewer enemies, they find more abundant food in the open fields than in the forests. The common field mouse is a favorite in their bill-of-fare; and the farmer's lambs and the goodwife's geese and turkeys never come amiss therein. These are all more easily got than hares or grouse. In justice to Reynard it must be said, however, that when mice are plenty lambs and poultry are seldom molested. In times of scarcity, he takes kindly to beech-nuts in the fall, and fills himself with grasshoppers and such small deer in the summer. When these fail — why, what would you? An honest fox must live.

When not running before the hounds, he is seldom seen in daytime, except it may be by some early riser whose sharp eye discerns him in the dim dawn, moving in meadow or pasture, or picking his stealthy way across lots to his home woods. In these woods he spends his days, sleeping or prowling slyly about in quest of some foolish hare or grouse. Going into the woods without a dog you might pass within a few yards of him

and never suspect that his keen eyes were watching you, or that the slight rustle of fallen leaves you heard was caused by his departing footsteps, as he stole away with a tree between you and him.

It is doubtful if the fox much resorts to his burrows except in great stress of weather and during the breeding season, or when driven to earth by relentless pursuit. For the most part, he takes his hours of ease curled up on some knoll, rock, or stump, his dense fur defying northern blasts and the "nipping and eager air" of the coldest winter night. Shelter from rain or snowstorms he undoubtedly will take, for he is not overfond of being bedraggled, though it is certain he will sometimes take to the water and cross a stream without being driven to it.

Reynard goes wooing in February, and travels far and wide in search of sweethearts, toying with every vixen he meets, but faithful to none, for his love is more fleeting than the tracks he leaves in the drifting snow. In April the vixen, having set her house in order by clearing it of rubbish, brings forth her young — from three to six or more at a litter. This house is sometimes a burrow in sandy soil with several entrances; sometimes a den in the rocks, and sometimes, in old woods, a hollow log. In four or five weeks the queer little pug-nosed cubs begin to play about the entrance. The mother hunts faithfully to provide them food,

and may sometimes be seen on her homeward way with a fringe of field mice hanging from her mouth. About the entrance to the den may be seen the wings of domestic poultry, wild ducks and grouse, and the legs of lambs — the fragments of many a vulpine feast.

It is a curious fact, and one I have never seen mentioned in print, that while the cubs are dependent on the mother, a hound will only follow her for a few minutes. Of the existence of this provision for the safety of the young foxes I have had ocular proof, confirmed by the statements of persons whom I believe. In June, 1868, an old vixen was making sad havoc with one of my neighbors' lambs, and an old fox-hunter was requested to take the field in their defense. He proceeded with his hounds (tolerably good ones) to the woods where her burrow was known to be, and put the dogs out. They soon started her and ran her out of the woods, but greatly to the surprise of the hunter they returned in a few moments, looking as shamefaced as whipped curs, with the old fox following them. Disgusted with the behavior of his own dogs, he sought the assistance of an old hound of celebrated qualities, belonging to a neighbor. She was put out with the other dogs, with just the same result. The vixen was, at last, shot while she was chasing the hounds, who then turned upon her, biting and shaking her as is

their wont when a fox is killed before them; but my friend, the hunter, told me they were as sick and distressed as ever dogs were after an encounter with a skunk. About the last of May, 1875, I witnessed a like incident. A staunch old hound of my own having accompanied me on a fishing excursion, started a fox in a piece of woods where a litter of young were known to be. Anxious to preserve the litter for sport in the fall, I hastened to call in the dog. I found him trotting along with lowered tail, the vixen leisurely trotting not more than five rods in advance, stopping every half-minute to bark at him, when he would stop till she again went on. I called him in as easily as if he had been nosing for a mouse, though under ordinary circumstances it would have required a vigorous assertion of authority to have taken him off so hot a scent.

If the life of the vixen is spared and she is not continually harassed by men or dogs during the breeding season, she will remain in the same locality for years, and rear litter after litter there; perhaps not always inhabiting the same burrow, but one somewhere within the same piece of woods or on the same hill. If she is much disturbed, or if she perceives that her burrow is discovered, she speedily removes her young to another retreat. The young foxes continue to haunt the woods where they were reared for some months after

they have ceased to require the care of their mother, and then disperse. The habits above mentioned are common to the cross and silver foxes as well as the red fox.

And now for the hunt. From his helpless babyhood in leafless April, Reynard has come, by the middle of the autumn, to months of discretion and to a large and increasing capacity for taking care of himself. The weapons are double-barrel shot-guns of such weight and caliber as may suit the individual fancy. A very light gun will not do the execution at the long range sometimes required, while, on the other hand, a very heavy one will become burdensome in the long tramps that may be necessary; for a man of ordinary strength, an eight-pound gun will be found quite heavy enough. It should be of a caliber which will properly chamber its full charge of, at least, BB shot — for I hold that the force of lighter shot will be broken by the thick fur of the fox; indeed I would suggest still heavier pellets, say BBB, or even A.

Our hounds, not so carefully bred as they should be, cannot be classed in any particular breed. They are more like the old Southern foxhound, than like the modern English; and for our purpose are incomparably superior to the latter. They are not fleet, like him (fleetness here being objectionable, as will be shown), but of great endurance, and unsurpassable scenting powers —

for they will follow a fox through all his devious windings and endless devices, from dawn till dark, through the night and for another day. Our best dogs are well described by Shakespeare in "Midsummer Night's Dream":

"My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,
So flew'd, so sanded; and their heads are hung
With ears that sweep away the morning dew;
Crook-kneed, and dew-lapp'd like Thessalian bulls;
Slow in pursuit, but matched in mouth like bells,
Each under each."

Their colors are blue-mottled, with patches of black and tan or yellow, with tan eye-patches; white, flecked with yellow, termed by old-time hunters, "punkin-an'-milk"; white and black and black and tan, with variations and admixtures of all these colors. It is an old saying, "that a good horse cannot be of a bad color"; and the color of a hound is more a matter of fancy than of excellence. A loud and melodious voice is a most desirable quality, and this many of our native fox-dogs possess in perfection. A hound with a weak voice is a constant worry, and one with a discordant voice vexes the ear.

When the game is started the dog should continually give tongue, so that you (and the fox as well) may always know just where he is. The wrinkled brows and foreheads, and long, pendent ears and flews of many of these dogs, give them an extremely sad and troubled expression from which

one might suppose their lives were "fu' o' sari-ousness." Perhaps (who knows?) this solemn cast of visage comes of much pondering on the knavish tricks of the wily fox, and of schemes for circumventing his many artifices. Their tails are not at all inclined to be bushy, like those of the English fox-hounds of the present day, but are almost as slender and clean as the tail of the pointer.

It is the early morning of one of the perfect days of late October or early November. In the soft gray light of the growing day the herbage of the pastures and the aftermath of the meadows are pearly with frost which is thick and white on boards and fence-rails. The air is chill, but un-stirred by the lightest breeze, and if the day keeps the promise of the morning it will be quite warm enough for comfortable tramping when the sun is fairly up. The hounds, called from their straw, come yawning and limping forth, stiff from the chase of yesterday, but are electrified with new life by the sight of the guns. They career about, sounding bugle-notes that wake the echoes for a mile around. Reynard at the wood-edge, home-ward bound from his mousing or poultry-stealing, is warned that this is to be no holiday for him. Very likely the hounds are too eager for the hunt to eat their morning Johnny-cake; if so, let them have their way — they will gobble it ravenously enough to-night, if they have the chance.

And now, away! across the frosty fields toward yonder low hill which we dignify with the name of mountain. No song-birds now welcome the coming day; almost the only sound which breaks the gray serenity is the clamor of a flock of crows in the distant woods, announcing their awakening to another day of southward journeying, or the challenge of a cock in a far-off farmyard. As you hurry across the home pasture, the cows stop chewing the cud, to stare curiously at hounds and hunters, and then arise, sighing and stretching, from their couches on the dry knolls. A flock of sheep start from their huddled repose and scurry away, halting at a little distance to snort and stamp at the rude disturbers of their early meditations. Almost the only signs of life are these and the upward-crawling smoke of kitchen chimneys, where sluggards are just making their first preparations for breakfast. Yours has been eaten this half-hour.

The old dog plods along, with serious and business-like air, disdaining and repelling all attempts of his younger companion to beguile him into any unseemly gambols; but when you cross the fence which bounds the pasture lying along the foot of the hill, where the rank grass, mixed with last year's growth, is ankle-deep, and where grass and innumerable stumps and logs afford harbor for colonies of field mice, you find "there is life

in the old dog yet." He halts for an instant and snuffs the air; draws toward a tuft of grass and noses it carefully; his sensitive nostrils dilate; his staid and sober tail begins, not to wag, but to describe circles; the serious lines of his brow become a frown; he mounts that log and snuffs it from end to end and back again with studious care. There has been a fox here, but which way has he gone? Never fear that the old dog will not tell you soon, but by what marvelous faculty he finds it out, who but a dog can tell? Alas! such niceties of his language are a sealed book to us. Now his loud, eager snuffing has grown to a suppressed challenge, and every muscle seems strained to its utmost tension as he leaves the log and makes a few lopes toward the woods, stops for an instant as if turned to stone, raises his good gray muzzle skyward, and awakens all the woods and hills with his deep, sonorous voice! That way has Reynard gone, and that bugle-note has perhaps given him premonition of his doom. This note has recalled the young dog from his wild ranging, and he joins his older and wiser companion, without bringing much aid, however, for, catching the scent, he proclaims his discovery till long after he has overrun it, now and then slightly disconcerting the old truth-teller; but the veteran soon learns to ignore the youngster and works his way steadily toward the wooded edge

of the hill, never increasing his speed nor abating the carefulness of his scenting. Now his tuneful notes become more frequent. If you have the heart of a fox-hunter, they are the sweetest music to your ears in all the world. Up the steep side of the hill he takes his way, the young dog following, and both giving tongue from time to time. They slowly work the trail to the top of an overhanging ledge and, now, there is a hush, but, almost before the echo of their last notes has died, forth bursts a wild storm of canine music. Reynard is afoot; or, as we Yankees say, "The fox is started," and the reeking scent of his recent footsteps steams hot in the nostrils of his pursuers. The hounds are now out of sight, but you hear every note of their jubilant song as they describe a small circle beyond the ledge, and then go northward along the crest of the hill. Their baying grows fainter and fainter as they bear away to the farther side, till at last it is almost drowned by the gurgle of the brook.

Now, get with all speed to "the Notch," which divides the north from the south hill, for this the fox will pretty surely cross when he comes back, if back he comes, after making a turn or two or three at the north end. On this habit of his, of running in circles, and in certain runways as he goes from hill to hill, or from wood to wood, is founded our method of hunting him. If he "plays"

in small circles, encompassing an acre or so, as he often will for half an hour at a time before a slow dog, you cautiously work up to leeward of him and try your chances for a shot. If he encircles the whole hill or crosses from hill to hill, there are certain points which every fox, whether stranger or to this particular woodland born, is *likely* to take in his way, but not *sure* to do so. Having learned these points by hearsay or experience, you take your post at the nearest or likeliest one, and between hope and fear await your opportunity. Such a place is this Notch, toward which with hasty steps and beating heart you take your way. When the fox returns, if he crosses to the south hill, he will come down that depression between the ledges which you face; then cross the brook and come straight in front of you, toward the wood-road in which you stand, or else turn off to the right to cross the road and go up that easy slope to the south hill, or turn to the left and cross on the other hand. Standing midway between these points, either is a long gun-shot off, but it is the best place to post yourself; so here take breath and steady your nerves.

How still the woods are! The hounds are out of hearing a mile away. No breeze sighs through the pines or stirs the fallen leaves. The trickle of the brook, the penny trumpet of a nuthatch, the light hammering of a downy woodpecker are the

only sounds the strained ear catches. All about rise the gray tree-trunks; overhead, against the blue-gray sky is spread their net of branches, with here and there a tuft of russet and golden and scarlet leaves caught in its meshes. At your feet on every side lie the fading and faded leaves, but bearing still a hundred hues; and through them rise tufts of green fern, brown stems of infant trees and withered plants; frost-blackened beech-drops, spikes of the dull azure berries of the blue cohosh, and milk-white ones, crimson-stemmed, of the white cohosh; scarlet clusters of wild turnip berries; pale asters and slender goldenrod, but all so harmoniously blended that no one object stands forth conspicuously. So kindly does Nature screen her children that in this pervading gray and russet, beast and bird, blossom and gaudy leaf, may lurk unnoticed almost at your feet. The rising sun begins to glorify the tree-tops. And now a red squirrel startles you, rustling noisily through the leaves. He scrambles up a tree, and with nervous twitches of feet and tail snickers and scolds till you feel almost wicked enough to end his clatter with a charge of shot. A blue jay has spied you and comes to upbraid you with his discordant voice. A party of chickadees draws nigh, flitting close about and pecking the lichened trunks and branches almost within arm's length, satisfying curiosity and hunger together.

At last, above the voices of these garrulous visitors, your ear discerns the baying of the hounds, faint and far away, swelling, dying, swelling, but surely drawing nearer. Louder rings the "musical confusion of hounds and echo in conjunction," as the dogs break over the hill-top. Now, eyes and ears, look and listen your sharpest. Bring the butt of your gun to your shoulder and be motionless and noiseless as death, for if at two gun-shots off Reynard sees even the movement of a hand or a turn of the head, he will put a tree-trunk between you and him, and vanish altogether and "leave you there lamenting."

Is that the patter of feet in the dry leaves or did the sleeping air awake enough to stir them? Is that the fox? Pshaw! no — only a red squirrel scurrying along a fallen tree. Is that quick, muffled thud the drum of a partridge? No, it never reaches the final roll of his performance. It is only the beating of your own heart. But now you hear the unmistakable nervous rustle of Reynard's footsteps in the leaves; now bounding with long leaps, now picking his way; now unheard for an instant as he halts to listen. A yellow-red spot grows out of the russet leaves, and that is he, coming straight toward you. A gun-shot and a half away, he stops on a knoll and turns halfway around to listen for the dogs. In awful suspense you wonder if he will come right on or sheer off and baffle you. But a

louder sounding of the charge by his pursuers sends him onward right toward you. His face is a study as he gallops leisurely along listening and plotting. He picks his way for a few yards along the outcropping stones in the bed of the brook, and then begins to climb the slope diagonally toward you. He is only fifty yards off when you raise the muzzle of your gun, drop your cheek to the stock, and aim a little forward of his nose; your finger presses the trigger and while the loud report is rebounding from wood to hill, you peer anxiously through the hanging smoke to learn whether you have cause for joy or mortification. Ah! there he lies, done to death, despite his speed and cunning. The old dog follows his every foot-step to the spot where he lies, stops for a breath in a half surprise as he comes upon him, then seizes him by the back, shaking him savagely, and biting him from shoulders to hips. Let him mouth his fallen foe to his heart's content, no matter how he rumples the sleek fur; it is his only recompense for the faithful service he has so well performed. And now the young dog comes up and claims his reward, and be sure this morning's work will go far toward making him as stanch and true as his chase-worn leader.

The shade of sadness for a moment indulged over the vigorous life so suddenly ended by your shot is but a passing cloud on the serene happiness

you feel at having acquitted yourself so well. If you had missed him, it would have been but small consolation to think the fox was safe. The hounds having had their just dues in mouthing and shaking, you strip off Reynard's furry coat — for if English lords may, without disgrace, sell the game they kill in their battues, surely a humble Yankee fox-hunter may save and sell the pelt of his fox without incurring the stigma of "pot-hunter." At least he may bear home the brush with skin attached, as a trophy.

But think not thus early nor with such successful issue is every chase to close. This was ended before the fox had used any other trick for baffling the hounds but his simplest one of running in circles. An hour or two later, an old fox, finding the dogs still holding persistently to all the windings of his trail, would have sped away to another hill or wood a mile or so off, and would have crossed newly ploughed fields, the fresh earth leaving no tell-tale scent; would have taken to traveled highways, where dust and the hoofs of horses and the footsteps of men combine to obliterate the traces of his passage; or have trod gingerly along many lengths of the top rails of a fence and then have sprung off at right angles from it to the ground, ten feet away; and then, perhaps, have run through a flock of sheep, the strong odor of whose feet blots out the scent of his.

These artifices quite bewilder and baffle the young dog, but only delay the elder who knows of old the tricks of foxes. Nothing can be more admirable than the manner of his working as he comes to the edge of the ploughed field. He wastes no time in useless pottering among the fresh-turned furrows, but with rapid lopes skirts their swarded border, till, at a far corner, his speed slackens as his keen nose catches the scent again in the damp grass; he snuffs at it an instant to assure himself, then sounds a loud, melodious note, and goes on baying at every lope till the road is reached. Along this he zigzags till he finds where the fox has left it. And now comes the puzzling bit of fence. The old dog thinks the fox has gone through it; he goes through it himself, but finds no scent there; puzzles about rapidly, now trying this side, now that; at last he bethinks himself of the top, to which he clambers and there finds the missing trail. But his big feet cannot tread the "giddy footing" of the rail as could Reynard's dainty pads, so down he goes and tries on either side for the point where the fox left the fence. Ranging up and down, too near it to hit the spot where Reynard struck the ground, he fails to recover the scent, stops — raises his nose and utters a long, mournful howl, half vexation, half despair. Now he climbs to the top rail farther on and snuffs it there. "No taint of a fox's foot is here," so he reasons, "and he must

have jumped from the fence between here and the place where I found it," and acting on this logical conclusion, he circles widely till he has picked up the trail once more, and goes merrily on to the sheep pasture. Here, satisfying himself of the character of this trick, he adopts the same plan employed at the ploughed field, and after a little finds the trail on the other side and follows it to the hill, but more slowly now, for the fox has been gone some time; the frost has melted, the moisture is exhaling and the scent growing cold.

The fox has long since reached the hill and half encircled it, and now hearing the voices of the hounds so far away and so slowly nearing, has bestowed himself on the mossy cushion of a knoll for rest and cogitation. Here he lies for a half-hour or more, but always alert and listening while the dogs draw slowly on, now almost losing the trail on a dry ledge, now catching it in a moist, propitious hollow, till at last a nearer burst warns poorly-boots that he must again up and away. He may circle about or "play," as we term it, on this hill, till you have reached a runaway on it where you may get a shot; or, when you have toiled painfully up the steep western pitch and have just reached the top, blown, leg-weary, but expectant, he will, probably, utterly disappoint and exasperate you by leaving this hill and returning to the one he and you have so lately quitted, yea, he will

even intensify the bitterness of your heart by taking in his way one or two or three points where you were standing half an hour ago! What is to be done? He may run for hours now on the hill where he was started, or he may be back here again before the hunter can have regained that. To hesitate may be to lose, may be to gain, the coveted shot. One must choose as soon as may be and take his chances. If two persons are hunting in company, one should keep to this hill, the other to that, or while on the same hill, or in the same wood, each to his chosen runway, thus doubling the chances of a shot.

At last the hounds may be heard baying continuously in one place, and by this and their peculiar intonation, one may know that the fox, finding his tricks unavailing, has run to earth, or, as we have it, "has holed." Guided to his retreat by the voices of the hounds, you find them there, by turns baying angrily and impatiently and tearing away, tooth and nail, the obstructing roots and earth. If in a sandy or loamy bank, the fox may, with pick and spade, be dug ignominiously forth, but this savors strongly of pot-hunting. If he has taken sanctuary in a rocky den, where pick and spade avail not, there is nothing for it but to call the dogs off and try for another fox to-day, or for this one to-morrow, when he shall have come forth again. This is the manlier part, in either

case for Reynard has fairly baffled you, has run his course and reached his goal in safety.

Sometimes an old fox, when he hears the first note of the hounds on the trail he made when he was mousing under the paling stars, will arise from his bed and make off at once over dry ledges, ploughed fields, and sheep pastures, leaving for the dogs nothing but a cold, puzzling scent, which, growing fainter as the day advances and the moisture exhales, they are obliged, unwillingly, to abandon at last, after hours of slow and painstaking work. A wise old hound will often, in such cases, give over trying to work up the uncertain trail, and guessing at the direction the fox has taken, push on, running mute, at the top of his speed to the likeliest piece of woodland, a mile away, perhaps, and there with loud rejoicings pick up the trail. When after a whole day's chase, during which hope and disappointment have often and rapidly succeeded each other in the hunter's breast, having followed the fox with untiring zeal through all the crooks and turns of his devious course, and unraveled with faultless nose and the sagacity born of thought and experience his every trick — the good dogs bring him at the last moment of the gloaming within range, and by the shot, taken darkling, Reynard is tumbled dead among the brown leaves, great is the exultation of hunter and hound, and great the happiness that

fills their hearts. After tramping since early morning over miles of the likeliest "starting-places" without finding any trail but cold and scentless ones made in the early night, and so old that the dogs cannot work them out, as the hunter takes his way in the afternoon through some piece of woodland, his hounds, as discouraged as he, with drooping tails and increased sorrow in their sad faces, plodding dejected at heel or ranging languidly, it is a happy surprise to have them halt. With raised muzzles and half-closed eyes, they snuff the air, then draw slowly up wind with elevated noses, till they are lost to sight behind gray trunks and mossy logs and withered brakes, and then, with a crashing flourish of trumpets, they announce that at last a fox has been found, traced to his lair by a breeze-borne aroma so subtle that the sense which detects it is a constant marvel. A fox started so late in the day seems loath to leave his wood, and is apt to play there till a shot gives hunter and hounds their reward.

When one sees in the snow the intricate windings and crossings and recrossings of the trail of a mousing fox, he can but wonder how any dog by his nose alone can untangle such a knotted thread till it shall lead him to the place where the fox has laid up for the day; yet this a good hound will unerringly do if the scent has not become too cold. To see him do this and to follow all his care-

ful, sagacious work are in no wise the least of the pleasures of this sport.

It is a favorite season for fox-hunting when the first snows have fallen, for though the walking is not so good, and hounds are often much inclined to follow the track by sight as well as by smell, the tell-tale footprints show pretty plainly which way the fox has gone, how long he has been gone, and whether it is worth your while to allow the dogs to follow his trail; and you are enabled to help the hounds in puzzling places, though a dog of wisdom and experience seldom needs help, except for the saving of time. A calm day is always best, and if warm enough for the snow to pack without being at all "sposhy," so much the better. Though it is difficult to "start" a fox during a heavy snowfall, if you do start him he is pretty certain to "play" beautifully, seeming to reckon much on the obliteration of his track by the falling snow. At such times he will often circle an hour in the compass of two or three acres. Glare ice holds scent scarcely more than water. This no one knows better than the fox, and you may be sure he will now profit by this knowledge if naked ice can be found. He will also run in the paths of the hare, pick his way carefully along rocky ridges, which have been swept bare of snow by the wind, leaving no visible trace of his passage, and, at times, take to traveled highways. If the snow is deep and light so that he

sinks into it, he will soon, through fatigue or fear of being caught, take refuge in den or burrow. If the snow has a crust which bears him, but through which the heavier hounds break at every step, he laughs them to scorn as he trips leisurely along at a tantalizingly short distance before them. Hunting in such seasons is weary work, and more desirable, then, is the solace of book and pipe by the cozy fire-side, where the hounds lie sleeping and dreaming of glorious days of sport already past or soon to come.

In winter as in autumn, the sport is invigorating and exciting, and Nature has, now as ever, her endless beauties and secrets for him who hath eyes to behold them. To such they are manifold in all seasons and he is feasted full, whether from the bald hill-top he looks forth over a wide expanse of gorgeous woods and fields, still green under October skies, or sees them brown and sere through the dim November haze, or spread white and far with December snows. The truest sportsman is not a mere skillful butcher, who is quite unsatisfied if he returns from the chase without blood upon his garments, but he who bears home from field and forest something better than game and peltry and the triumph of a slayer, and who counts the day not lost nor ill spent though he can show no trophy of his skill. The beautiful things seen, the ways of beasts and birds noted, are what he treasures far longer than the number of successful shots.

DANVIS FARM LIFE

POETS have sung the delights of the farmer's life in strains so enchanting that one might wonder why all the world has not forsaken every other pursuit and betaken itself to the tilling of the soil. But the farmer himself, in the unshaded hay-field, or plodding in the clayey furrow at the tail of his plough, with a freeholder's right sticking to each boot, or bending, with aching back, between the corn-rows, or breasting the winter storms in the performance of imperative duties, looks at his life from a different point of view. To him this life appears as full of toil and care and evil chances as that of any other toiler. And true it is, the life of an ordinary farmer is hard, with too little to soften it—too much of work, too little of play. But as true is what the poet sang so long ago: "Thrice happy are the husbandmen if they could but see their blessings"; for they have independence, more than any others who by the sweat of the brow earn their bread, and the pure air of heaven to breathe, and the blessed privilege of daily communion with nature.

It is not easy for the farmer to see any beauty in his enemies — the meadows full of daisies, with which he is forever fighting, or by which he has

been ignominiously conquered; the encroaching ranks of goldenrods along the borders of his fields, and the bristling bayonets of those Canadian invaders, the thistles. How few farmers, or other people for that matter, see in the climbing blushes of the dawning day, or the gorgeous painting of its close, or in the perfect day itself, anything but the foretelling of fair or foul weather; or notice the ways of any untamed bird or beast, except that the crows come to pull the corn, the hawks to catch the chickens, and the foxes to steal the lambs and turkeys. However, the farmer generally does feel a thrill of pleasure when, in the hazy softness of a February or March day, he hears the caw of the first carrion-seeking, hungry crow. "The heart of winter is broken." In April when the fields begin to show a suspicion of coming green and give forth an odor of spring, and the dingy snowbanks along the fences are daily dwindling, he welcomes the carol of the first blue-bird, and is glad to hear the robin utter his restless note from the boughs of the old apple-tree; and the clear voice of the new-come meadowlark strikes him as not altogether unmusical; and when he hears the plaintive cry of the grass-plover he is sure spring has come. Then he thinks of the small birds no more till the first blasts of returning winter sweep over the bare trees and frozen fields, when, all at once, he becomes aware that

the troubadours are gone. He sees that the brave little chickadee remains faithful to his post, and feels that his cheery note enlivens a little the dreariness of winter, as does the reedy piping of the nuthatch and the voice of the downy, fuller of life than of music, and the discordant note of the blue jay, who, clad in a bit of summer sky, loudly proclaims his presence; but the singers are gone and the farmer misses them.

Winter is fairly upon us at last, though by such gradual approaches has it come that we are hardly aware of its presence, for its white seal is not yet set upon the earth. Till then we have a feeling that the fall is not over. The mud of the highways is turned to stone, the bare gray trees and dun fields have no semblance of life in them, and the dull, cold sky and the black-green pines and hemlocks look colder than snow. The Thanksgiving turkey has been disposed of, and the young folks begin to count the days to Christmas. The old house has been "banked" for weeks, making the cellar a rayless dungeon, from which cider and winter apples are now brought forth to help while away the long evenings. At no time of the day is the fire's warmth unwelcome. But no snow has come except in brief flurries; and the cattle are out on the meadows in the daytime cropping the withered aftermath, and the sheep are yet in the pastures or straying in the bordering woods.

But now comes an afternoon with a breathless chill in it — “a hard, dull bitterness of cold”; when the gray sky settles down upon the earth, covering, first, the blue, far-away mountains with a gray pall, then the nearer, somber hills with a veil through which their rough outlines show but dimly, and are quite hidden when the coming snowfall makes phantoms of the sturdy trees in the woods hard by. Then roofs and roads and fence-tops and grassless ground begin slowly to whiten, and boughs and twigs are traced with a faint white outline against a gray background, and the dull yellow of the fields grows paler under the falling snow, and a flock of snowbirds drifts across the fading landscape like larger snowflakes. The nightfall comes early, and going out on the back stoop you find yourself on a little island in a great sea of misty whiteness, out of which looms dimly the dusky barn, with its freight of live-stock, grain, and hay, the only ship within hail.

Aroused next morning by the stamping feet of the first risers who have gone forth to explore, we find that a new world seems to have drifted to us while we were lying fast anchored to the old chimney. Roofs are heaped and fences coped and trees are whiter than in May with bloom, with the universal snow. The great farm-wagon, standing half hub-deep in it, looks as out of place as if at sea. The dazed fowls peer wonderingly from the

poultry-house, or, adventuring short trips therefrom, stop bewildered midway in their journey. Presently the gray objects rising out of the strange white expanse take on more familiar shapes, and we recognize the barn, the orchard (though it has an unsubstantial look, as if the first wind might blow it away or an hour's warm sunshine melt it), the well-known trees, the neighbors' houses, the faint lines of the fences tracing the boundaries of fields and farms, the woods, and beyond them the unchanged outlines of wooded hills and the far-away mountains, but with a new ruggedness in their sides and with new clearings, till now unknown, showing forth in white patches on their slopes. We may take our time, for we shall have long months in which to get acquainted with this changed world.

The first day of snow is a busy one. If the snowfall is great, there are paths to be shoveled to the outbuildings, and wagons to be housed, and sleighs to be got out and made ready, and many little jobs, put off from time to time, to be attended to. Perhaps there are young cattle, homeless and unfed in the out-lot, lowing piteously, to be brought to winter quarters, and sheep to be brought home from their pasture. Happy are the boys if to them is allotted this task, for the sheep are sure to have sought the shelter of the woods, and in the woods what strange sights may not be

seen! With trousers tied at ankle they trudge across the white fields, pathless and untracked save where old Dobbin, scorning barnyard and shelter, with whitened back and icicled sides, paws away the snow down to the withered grass which he crops with as great apparent relish as if it was the herbage of June.

Across meadow and pasture to the woodland the youngsters go, and take the old wood-road, now only a winding streak of white through the gray of tree-trunks and outcropping rocks, its autumnal border of asters, goldenrods, and ferns all lain down to sleep beneath the snow. Here Reynard's track crosses it, he having gone forth hare- or partridge-hunting, and so lately passed that the human nose can almost catch the scent of his footsteps—what an ecstatic song the old hound would sing over it! Here is the trail of the gray squirrel, where he scampered from tree to tree — one pair of little tracks and one pair of larger ones, as if two-legged animals had made them; and here is a maze of larger footprints, where the hare's broad pads have made their faint impress on the snow. Jays scream overhead and chickadees flit from tree to tree along the roadside. Now, almost at their feet, a ruffed grouse breaks forth from his snowy covering in a little whirlwind of his own making, and goes off with a startling whir and clatter through the snow-laden branches, a dusky

meteor. From a near branch in the twilight of a thicket a great horned owl flies away, noiseless as a ghost. With so much to interest them the boys almost forget their errand till they come upon the faint trail of the sheep. Slowly working this out, they at last find the flock wandering aimlessly about nibbling such twigs and withered leaves as are within their reach. Their sojourn in the woods, brief as it has been, has given them back something of the original wildness of their race. They mistrust man of evil designs against them when they meet him in the woods, and run from the sheep-call, "ca-day!" "ca-day!" which in the open fields would bring them in an eager throng about the caller. But civilization has made them dependent, as it has their masters, and they flee homeward for safety, and the boys follow them out through the snowy arches of the woods to the pasture, and so home to the snug quarters where they are to pass the dead months.

The first foddering is bestowed in the racks, and all the woolly crew fall to with a will and a busy snapping of many jaws. And so, at nine in the morning and at three in the afternoon, are they to be fed till the pastures are green again in May.

Happier they than the hardy "native" sheep of their owner's grandfather, which had no shelter but the lee of the stack that they were fed from in the bleak meadow, pelted by cruel winds

and sometimes so snowed in that they had to be released from their imprisonment by dint of much shoveling. This old-time foddering, which was the fare of all the stock but the horses and working oxen, though sadly lacking in comfort for feeder and fed, was very picturesque: the farmer, in blue-mixed smock-frock of homespun woolen, pitching down the great forkfuls from the stack; the kine and sheep crowding and jostling for the first place on the leeward side, or chasing wisps of wind-tossed hay down wind; then the farmer distributing the fodder in little piles, followed by all the herd, each thinking (as who does not?) that what he has not is better than what he has; the strong making might right; the poor underling, content to snatch the scant mouthfuls, overrun by the stronger brethren — all in a busy throng about the rail pen from which rises the dun truncated cone of the stack, their only harbor in the wide, white sea. A path, to be freshly broken after every wind or snowfall, leads to the water-holes, chopped out every morning in the brook, some furlongs off, whither they wend their way in lazy lines as the day grows older. But no one need mourn the passing away of this old custom; for the later warm stables, sheds, and barnyards, with their contented and well-sheltered inmates, are comfortable as well as picturesque.

A pleasant thing to look upon is an old gray barn with its clustering sheds, straw-stacks, and well-fenced yards; in this the cattle taking their day's outing from the stable; in that the sheep feeding from their racks or chewing the cud of contentment, or making frequent trips to the water-trough in the corner.

Inside is the broad "barn floor," with grain scaffolds above it, and on one side a great "bay" filled with hay; on the other, the stable for the cows; and over this a "mow." In the mysterious heights above, whose dusty gloom is pierced by bolts of sunshine, are dimly seen the cobwebbed rafters and the deserted nests of the swallows.

On this floor, in winter days, the threshers' flails are beating out the rye with measured throb. Chanticleer and Partlet and all their folk come to the wide-open southern doors to pick the scattered kernels, and the cattle "toss their white horns" in their stanchions and look with wonder in their soft eyes on this unaccountable pounding of straw. Then, when the "cave" (as the long pile of unwinnowed grain on one side the floor is called) has become so large as to narrow too much the threshing-room, the fanning-mill is brought from its corner, and amid clatter and clouds of dust the grain is "cleaned up" and carried away to the granary. Here, too, in the early morning comes the farmer or his man to fodder the cows

by lantern-light, and to milk the "winter cow" whose meager, foamless "mess" alone now furnishes the household all the milk it has.

The early chores done, breakfast comes when goodman and goodwife, — as Gervase Markham delights to style the farmer and his wife, — their children and hired folk, all gather about the long table in the big kitchen, and doughty trencher men and women prove themselves every one. The fried pork, or sausages, or beefsteak, — let us hope not fried, — or cold roast beef, left from yesterday's dinner, the potatoes, the wheaten and "rye-'n'-injun" bread, the johnny-cake or buck-wheat-cakes, the apple-sauce, the milk and the butter, colored with October's gold, and likely enough the sugar, are all home-grown; nothing "boughten" but the tea or coffee and the pepper and salt.

After breakfast the children, with books and dinner-pails and "shining morning faces," set out for school; but not "creeping unwillingly," for there will be plenty of fun there at "recess" and nooning, with sleds and snowballing and no end of outdoor winter games.

The sheep are fed and then some work of the day begins. Perhaps it is threshing or drawing wood home or to the market from the "woodlot" where a man is chopping "by the cord." He is, likely enough, a light-hearted "Canuck" fresh

from his Canadian home, as yet un-Yankeefied and unspoiled; garrulous with his droll French-English; as ready as another to laugh at his own mistakes; picturesque in his peaked woolen cap and coarse, oddly fashioned dress of homespun gray with red-sashed waist and moccasined feet.

A skillful wielder of the axe is he, and, though a passably loyal subject of a queen, with no whit of reverence for these ancient monarchs of the forest which he hews down relentlessly, regardless of their groans as they topple to their fall. He has brought an acre or more of the woods' white floor face to face with the steel-blue winter sky, and all over the little waste are piled in cords and half-cords the bodies of the slain kings, about whose vacant mossed and lichened thrones are heaped their crowns in ignominious piles. He has a fire, more for company than for warmth, whereat he often lights his short, blackened clay pipe and sits by while he eats his half-frozen dinner and while the smoke fills the woods about with a blue haze and a pungent fragrance.

Here, now, comes the farmer, mounted on his stout sled with its long wood-rack, driving his steaming horses which he blankets while he makes his load. He exchanges with the chopper badly fashioned sentences of very bad French for rattling volleys of no better English, upbraiding him, perhaps, for piling his wood with bark down, or

for an intermixture of crooked and knotty sticks, — devices well known to professional choppers for making piles measure large, — a charge which the Canadian repels with loud protestations of honesty and frantic gestures, or pretends not to understand. His sled laden, the farmer leaves the regicide to his slaughter and wends his creaking way homeward along the gray-pillared arcade of the narrow, winding wood-road, whose brushy border scrapes and clatters against the jagged load as it passes. This and the muffled tread of the horses and the creaking of the runners in the snow, the fainter-growing axe-strokes, and now and then the booming downfall of a great tree, are the few sounds that break the winter stillness of the woods. The partridge looks down on him from its safe perch in the thick-branched hemlock. A hare bounds across the road before him, as white and silent as the snow beneath its feet. An unseen fox steals away with noiseless footsteps. Driving out of the sheltering woods into the wind-swept fields, here through deep-drifted hollows, there over ridges blown so nearly bare that the bleached grass rustles above the thin snow, he fares homeward, or to the well-beaten highway, and by it to the market in the village or at the railroad.

He is apt to tarry long at the village store, under the plausible pretext of getting thoroughly warm, and likely enough gossips with neighbors

or cheapens the storekeeper's wares till "chore-time" draws nigh.

Loads of logs are drawn to the sawmill, a quaint old structure whose mossy beams have spanned its swift raceway for half a century or more. The green ooze of the leaky flume turns the icicles to spikes of emerald, and the caves beneath the log dam have crystal portals of fantastic shapes. Heaps of logs and piles of boards and slabs environ it on the landward side, and a pleasant odor of freshly cut pine pervades the neighborhood. Its interior is as comfortless in winter as a hill-top, "cold as a sawmill" being a New England proverb; and it is often said of one who leaves outer doors open in cold weather, "Guess he was brought up in a sawmill, where there wa'n't no doors." It is a poor lounging-place now for our farmer, but the dusty gristmill hard by offers greater attractions. Maybe he has brought a grist atop of his logs, and has good excuse to toast his shins by the miller's glowing stove while he waits the grinding.

On the millpond, alder-fringed and overhung by lithe-limbed birches, the farmers gather their ice-crop, one that New England winters never fail to produce most bountifully. Simpler tools are used here than are employed by the great ice companies of the cities. The same cross-cut saw that cuts the logs with a man at each handle is

used here by one man (one handle being taken out) for cutting the ice, which is then drawn out of the water with ordinary ice-tongs and carried home, a regal freight of a dozen or more great blocks of crystal at a load.

The hay for market is hauled in bulk to the large stationary presses on the line of the railroad, or pressed into bales by portable presses set up at barns or stacks and the bales then drawn to the point of delivery. This is the work of fall, winter, or spring, as the case may be.

The laborious pastime of breaking colts is now in order and the younger ones are broken to the halter, the older to harness, often in the shafts of a primitive sleigh commonly known as a "jumper," each thill and runner of which is formed of one tough sapling cut halfway through, with a wide notch at the point where runner becomes thill. The boys may take a pull at the long halter of the stubborn youngster, but a stronger hand than theirs must give the two-year-old or three-year-old initiatory lessons in his life of labor.

On Saturdays, when there is no school, the boys sometimes have a jolly time breaking a pair of steer calves. A miniature yoke couples the stubby-horned, pot-bellied little cattle together, and the boy's sled is their light burden. A runaway of the baby oxen is not unlikely to occur, but only adds to the fun of the affair.

In such pursuits the day passes till foddering-time comes, when the sheep-racks are cleared of "orts" which are thrown outside the yard for Dobbin to glean from, and the sheep foddered afresh from the mow. The cows are stabled and fed. The clamor of the pigs ceases as their troughs are filled with swill. The horses are cared for, the night's wood carried in, and then with supper begins the long winter evening.

The bustling hired girl clears the table and washes the dishes with tremendous clatter, gives the kitchen its last sweeping for the day, and then, if she has not dough to knead for the morrow's baking, makes herself tidy and settles herself comfortably to her sewing. The goodwife knits or sews while she chats with her maid or listens to the items her goodman reads from the local paper; the youngsters puzzle with knitted brows over the sums of to-morrow's 'rithmetic lesson; the hired man munches apples and smokes his pipe while he toasts his stockinged feet at the great cook-stove, beneath which Tray and Tubby snore and purr in peaceful unison.

Though every farmhouse now has its sitting-room and parlor, and most a dining-room, the kitchen continues to be a favorite with farming folk — a liking probably inherited from our grandfathers. In many of their houses this was the only large room, in which the family lived, and where

all meals were taken, guests entertained, and merry-makings held. At one end was the great fireplace wherein back-log and fore-stick burned, sending forth warmth and light, intense and bright over the broad hearth, but growing feebler toward the dim corners where Jack Frost lurked and grotesque shadows leaped and danced on the wall. On the crane, suspended by hook or trammel, hung the big samp-kettle, bubbling and seething. The open dresser shone with polished pewter mug and trencher. Old-fashioned, splint-bottomed chairs, rude but comfortable, sent their long shadows across the floor.

The tall clock measured the moments with deliberate tick. The big wheel and little, the one for wool, the other for flax; the poles overhead, with their garniture of winter crooknecks and festoons of dried apples; the long-barreled flintlock that had borne its part in Indian fight, at Bennington, and in many a wolf and bear hunt, hanging with powder-horn and bullet-pouch against the chimney — all these made up a homely interior far more picturesque than any to be found in modern farmhouses. Those who remember old-time cookery aver that in these degenerate days there are no johnny-cakes so sweet as those our grandmothers baked on a board on the hearth, no roast meats so juicy as those which slowly turned on spits before the open fire, nor any brown bread or

baked beans to compare with those which the old brick ovens and bake-kettles gave forth.

In those old kitchens that have partly withstood the march of improvement, the great fireplace has fallen into disuse. Oftener it has been torn down, chimney, oven, and all, to make room, now deemed better than its company, and its place supplied by the more convenient cook-stove. The woodwork is painted, the smoke-stained whitewash is covered by figured wall-paper; and-irons, crane, pot-hook, and trammel have gone for old iron; the place of the open dresser is usurped by a prim closed cupboard; big and little wheel, relics of an almost lost and forgotten handicraft, have long since been banished to the garret. There, too, has gone the ancient clock, and a short, dapper timepiece, on whose lower half is a landscape of startling colors, hurries the hours away with swift loud tick.

Everything has undergone some change; even the old gun has had its flintlock altered to percussion.

Of all the rooms in our farmhouse, the kitchen chamber is probably the least changed. Its veined and blistered whitewashed ceiling, low sloping at the sides, still bumps unwary heads. The great trunk that held grandmother's bedding when she and grandfather, newly wedded, moved into this, then, wild country, and the sailor great-

uncle's sea-chest, occupy their old corners. The little fireplace is unchanged and on the chimney above it hang, as of old, bundles and bags of bone-set, catnip, sage, summer savory, elder-root, slippery-elm, and no end of roots and herbs for sick men's tea and well men's seasoning. There are the same low beds with patchwork covers and by their side the small squares of rag carpet — little oases for naked feet in the chill desert of the bare floor; and the light comes in through the same little dormer-windows through which it came seventy years ago. To this dormitory the hired man betakes himself when his last pipe is smoked, and soon, in nasal trumpet-blasts, announces his arrival in the Land of Nod, to which by nine o'clock or so all the household have followed.

Where do the birds, who brave with us the rigors of the New England winter, pass the chill nights, and where find harbor from the pitiless storms? They are about the house, woodpile, out-buildings, and orchards all the clear cold days — downy, nuthatch and chickadee — searching every nook and cranny of the rough-barked locust and weather-beaten board and post for their scanty fare; and blue jay, busy with the frozen apples or the droppings of the granary. But when a roaring, raving storm comes down from the north they vanish. When we face it to go to the barn to fodder the stock, we do not find them

sheltered there; nor at the morning foddering, climbing to the dusky mow, do we disturb them as toward spring or in its early days we do such poor song-birds, sparrows and robins, as have been fooled by a few warm days into a too early coming, to find themselves suddenly encompassed by such bitter weather as they fled from months ago. Doubtless the windless thickets of the woods and the snug hollows of old trees are the shelter of our little winter friends in such inclement seasons.

One night in the week, it may be, the young folks all pack off in the big sleigh to the singing-school in the town-house, where they and some scores of others combine to murder psalmody and break the heart of their instructor.

At these gatherings are flirtations and heart-burnings as well as at the "donation parties," which occur once or twice in the winter, when with kindly meant unkindness the poor minister's house is taken possession of by old and young, whose gifts too often but poorly compensate for the upturning and confusion they have made with their romping games.

So winter drags its hoary length through dreary months, with silent snowfall, fierce storm, and dazzling sunshine. Mows dwindle and stacks disappear, leaving only the empty pens to mark their place, and cisterns fail, making the hauling of snow for melting an added task to the boys'

duties. Bucksaw and axe are each day making shorter the long pile of cordwood and greater the pile of stovewood.

The traditional "January thaw" comes and sets all the brooks a-roaring and makes lakes of the flat meadows, while the south wind blows with a springlike softness and sighs itself asleep. The sky clears and the north wind awakes and out-roads the brooks till it locks them fast again and turns the flooded meadows to glittering ice-fields whereon the boys have jolly skating bouts in the moonlit evenings.

Many another snowfall comes, perhaps, but every day the sunshine waxes warmer, and the snow melts slowly off the roofs and becomes "countersunk" about tree-trunks and mullein-stalks. The tips of weather-beaten grass appear above it and the great drifts grow dingy. It becomes pleasant to linger for a while in shirt-sleeves on the sunny side of the barn, listening to the steady drip of the icicled eaves and the cackling of hens, and watching the cattle lazily scratching themselves and chewing their cuds in the genial warmth.

The first crow comes, and now, if never again in all the year, his harsh voice has a pleasant sound. Roads grow "slumpy" and then so nearly bare that people begin to ponder whether they shall go forth on runners or wheels.

Some early lambs enter upon their short life, and knock-kneed calves begin to make the old barn echo with their bawling and the clatter of their clumsy gambols. The gray woods take on the purple tinge of swelling buds. The brooks resume their merry music. The song-sparrows come, the bluebird's carol is heard, the first robin ventures to come exploring, and high overhead the wild geese are winging their northward way. Though Jack Frost strives every night to regain his sway and often for whole days maintains a foothold, his fortunes slowly wane and spring comes coyly but surely on.

Her footsteps waken the woodchuck from his long sleep, and he comes to his door to look about him, with eyes unaccustomed to the sunlit day. In the plashy snow of the woods, the raccoon's track shows that he has wandered from den or hollow tree. Southern slopes, then broad fields, grow bare, till all the snow is gone from them but the soiled drifts in the hollows and along the fences; in the woods it still lies deep, but coarse-grained and watery.

The blood of the maples is stirred, and in sugar-making regions the tapping of the trees is begun. A warm day following a freezing night sets all the spouts a-dripping merrily into the bright tin "tubs," and once or twice a day the oxen and sled go winding through the woods, hauling a cask to

which the sap is brought from the trees with buckets and neck-yoke, and then taken to the sugar-house. This is set, if possible, at the foot of some hillside or knoll, on which the sled may be driven so that its burden overtops the great holders standing beside the boiling-pans within. Into these holders the sap is discharged through a pipe. Now the boiling begins, and the thin sap thickens to rich syrup as it seethes and bubbles in its slow course from the first pan to the last, while the woods about are filled with the sweet odor of its steam.

Following up this scent, and the sounds of merry chatter, one may come upon a blithe "sugar party" of young folks, gathered in and about the sugar-house. In this earliest picnic of the season the sole refreshment is hot sugar poured on clean snow, where it cools to a gummy consistency known as "waxed" sugar. The duty of the rustic gallant is to whittle a little maple paddle (which is held to be the proper implement for sugar-eating) for his mistress, and to keep her allotted portion of the snowbank well supplied with the amber-hued sweet.

In earlier days the sap, caught in rough wooden troughs, was boiled in a potash-kettle, suspended by a log-chain from the smaller end of a goodly sized tree trimmed of its branches and balanced across a stump. A few rudely piled stones formed

the fireplace, whose chimney was the wide air, and every veering puff of wind would encloud the red-shirted sugar-maker in the smoke of his fire and the steam of his kettle. Kettle, fireplace, and ponderous crane had no roofing but the overbranching trees and the sky above them; the only shelter of the sugar-makers from rain and "sugar snows" was a little shanty as rude as an Indian wigwam in construction and furniture.

The woodpecker sounds his rattling drum-call; the partridge beats his muffled roll; flocks of blackbirds gurgle a liquid song, and the hyla tunes his shrill pipe, while advancing Spring keeps step to their music, more and more pervading all nature with her soft, mysterious presence.

In the woods the snow has shrunk to the cold shelter of the ledges, and the arbutus begins to blossom half-unseen among its dull green and russet leaves, and liverwort flowers dot the sunny slopes with tufts of white, and pink, and blue.

Sap-flow and sugar-making slacken, so that a neighbor finds time to visit another at his sugar-works, and asks, "Have you heard the frogs?" Only one "run" of sap after the frogs peep is the traditional rule. So the frogs having peeped, the last run comes and sugar-making ends.

A wholesome fragrance is wafted to you on the damp wind, like and yet unlike the earth-smell which precedes a shower — the subtile blending of

the exhalations of sodden leaves and quickened earth, with the faint perfume of the shad trees, shining white with blossoms, as if snow-laden in the purple woods, and the willow catkins that gleam in swamps and along the brimming streams. It is a purely springlike odor.

The fields of winter wheat and rye, if the snow has kindly covered them through the bitter weather, take on a fresher green, and the southern slopes of pasture-lands and the swales show tinges of it.

The sower is pacing the fall-ploughed ground to and fro with measured tread, scattering the seed as he goes, and, after him, team and harrow scratch the mould. In favored places the ploughs are going, first streaking, then broadly patching, the somber fields with the rich hue of freshly turned sward. Then early potatoes are planted, gardens made, corn-ground made ready, and houses unbanked, letting daylight into cellars once more.

All day long the lamentations of bereaved cows are heard. "Settings" of milk begin to crowd the dairy, and churning, that plague of the boy, becomes his constant alternate dread and suffering.

As pastures grow green the sheep are "tagged" and released from their long confinement in shed and yard. With loud rejoicings they go rushing along the lane to the pasture, eager for the first

nibble of the unforgotten herbage. Not many days later the cows are turned out, and the lush feed turns their pale butter to gold.

Young lambs now claim the farmer's care. Each day he must visit the flock to see if some unnatural mother must not be forced to give suck to her forlorn yeanling, or if some, half dead with the cold of night or storm, need not be brought to the kitchen fire to be warmed to life. When a "lamb-killer" comes, as the cold storms are called which sometimes occur in May, his arms are likely enough to be filled with them before he has made the round of the pasture. Often an orphaned or disowned lamb is brought up by hand, and the "cosset" becomes the pet of the children and the pest of the household. If Madame Reynard takes a fancy to spring lamb for the provision of her household she makes sad havoc. Her depredations must be stopped some way, either by removing the flock to a safer pasture, or, if her burrow can be found, by digging out and destroying her young, leaving her with no family to provide for or by ending with her own life her free-booting career. To compass her taking-off, the farmer repairs with his gun, in the gray of the morning, to the woodside, from which he enters the field and, hiding behind a stump to leeward of her customary line of approach, awaits her coming. As, on evil deeds intent, she steals cautiously

from the cover of the woods, her faded, ragged, whitey-yellow fur is in sorry contrast with the beauty of her dress when days were cold and cares were light. The farmer imitates the squeak of a mouse. The sound, though slight, catches her ear at once, and she draws nearer and nearer the stump from which it proceeds, stopping frequently to listen, with cocked head, till, when within short range, she is cut down by a heavy charge.

In his first days the Merino lamb is one of the homeliest of young things, pink-nosed, lean, wrinkled, and lop-eared, and stumbling about in uncertain fashion on its clumsy, sprawling legs. But a month or six weeks of life give him prettiness enough to make amends for the ugliness of his early infancy. There is no prettier sight to be seen on the farm than a party of them at play, toward the close of the day, running in a crowd at the top of their speed from one knoll to another, then frisking a moment in graceful gambols, and then scampering back again, while the staid matrons of the flock look on in apparent wonder at their antic sport.

When the ditches are dark green with young marsh marigolds, "good for greens," it is a pleasant outing on a warm day, for goodwife and children to go picking "cowslips," as they are sure to call them.

A thousand banished birds have come to their own again. The creak and twitter of the well-beloved swallows echo through the half-empty barn. Robins and phœbes have built their nests; the advance guard of bobolinks are rollicking in the meadows where the meadowlark pertly walks, his conspicuous yellow and black breast belying his long-drawn "can't-see-me." Orioles flash among the elm branches where they are weaving their pensile nests. The purple linnet showers his song from the tree-top, and far and clear from the upland pasture comes the wailing cry of the plover. Chickadee has gone to make his summer home in woods whose purple gray is sprinkled now with golden green, and where bath-flowers are blooming and tender shoots are pushing up through the matted leaves of last year.

The hickory has given the sign for corn-planting, for its leaves are as large as a squirrel's ear (some say, a squirrel's foot). This important labor having been performed, the grotesque scarecrow is set at his post, or glittering tins, or twine festooned from stake to stake, do duty in his stead.

Now there comes a little lull in work betwixt planting and hoeing during which boys and hired men assert their right, established by ancient usage, to take a day to go a-fishing. Those whose country is blessed with such streams of liquid crystal steal with careful steps along some trout-

brook whose braided current washes mossy, root-woven banks, in old woods, gurgling over pebbly beds and plashing down lichened rocks into pools where the wary trout lurks under the foam bells, or slips through alder copses into meadows where it winds almost hidden by the rank grass that overhangs its narrow course.

Our rustic angler uses no nice skill in playing or landing his fish, but having him well hooked jerks him forth by main strength of arm and clumsy pole and line, with a force that sends him, whether he be perch or bull-pout, or, by lucky chance, pike-perch or bass, in a curving flight high overhead, and walloping with a resounding thud on the grass far behind his captor.

Perhaps all hands go to the nearest seining-ground, and, buying a haul, stand an eager group on the sandy beach, joking feebly while they nervously wait and watch the rippling curve of floats as the net comes sweeping slowly in, bringing, maybe, for their half-dollar, only a few worthless clams and sunfish, or, if fortune favors, maybe a floundering crowd of big fish, which, strung on a tough twig, they carry home rejoicing.

The housewife's fowls are conspicuous objects now about the farmhouse — the anxious, fussy hens, full of solicitude for their broods, some, well grown, straying widely from the coop in adventurous explorations or in awkward pursuit of in-

sects; some, little balls of down, keeping near the home threshold and mindful of the maternal call, while Chanticleer saunters proudly among his wives and children with no care but to keep an eye out for those swooping pirates, the hawks. The ducks waddle away in Indian file to the pond which they share with the geese; and the turkeys, silliest of fowls, wander far and wide, an easy prey to fox or hawk.

Night and morning a persuasive call, "Boss! boss! boss!" invites the calves — those soft-eyed, sleek-coated, beautiful idiots — to the feeding stanchion in the corner of their paddock, where they receive their rations of "skim" milk and then solace themselves with each other's ears for the lost maternal udders.

In the placid faces of their mothers, as they come swinging homeward from the pasture, there is no sign of bereavement nor of its lightest recollection. Happy beasts whose pangs of sorrow kindly Nature so quickly heals!

In the last of the blossom-freighted days of May is one that each year grows dearer to us. There is scarcely a graveyard among our hills but has its little flag, guarding, in sun and shower, the grave of some soldier. Hither come farmers and villagers with evergreens and flowers, no one so thoughtless that he does not bring a spray of plum-blossoms or cluster of lilacs, no child so poor that

it does not bear bunches of violets and dandelions, while the mothers rob the cherished house plants of their bloom and girls bring all the flowers of the wood.

Far more touching than the long processions that with music and flags and floral chariot wind through the great cemeteries of our cities, are the simple rites of the small scattered groups of country folks who come to deck with humble flowers the resting-place of the soldier who was neighbor or brother or comrade. While the garlands yet are fresh and fragrant on the graves, Spring blossoms into the perfect days of June.

He who now braves the onslaughts of the bloodthirsty mosquito, in the leafy fastnesses of the June woods, will see, not so many birds as he may expect to, judging from the throngs in fields and orchards, but many of those he does see will be unknown to him if he has not the lore of the ornithologist and a sharp eye and ear to boot. However, he will meet old acquaintances, his little friends the chickadees and the nuthatches, the commoner woodpeckers and the yellow-bellied, perhaps. The jays will scold him and the crows make a pother overhead if he chances in the neighborhood of their nests, and, likely enough, he will see fluttering and skulking before him a brown something — is it beast or bird? — and some nimble balls of brown and yellow down dis-

appearing under the green leaves of this year or the dead ones of last, at his very feet, which, after the first moment of surprise, he knows are a hen-partridge and her young. Tracing an unmistakable half-harsh note to a tree-top he sees the red-hot glow of a scarlet tanager and knows that his dull green mate is not far off.

Led by the sound of axe-strokes, falling quicker and not so strongly as those of the wood-chopper, he breasts the tangle of broad-leafed hobble-bush and the clustered bloom of cornels and comes upon a man busy with axe and spade peeling the hemlock logs cut last winter; some shining in the "chopping" in the whiteness of their fresh nakedness, their ancient vestments set up against them to dry; others, still clad in the furrowed bark, drilled by the beaks of a thousand woodpeckers and scratched by the claws of numberless generations of squirrels. It is one of Nature's mysteries that these prostrate trunks should feel the thrill of her renewed life and their sap flow again for a little while through the severed ducts. If the hand that now strips them were the same that hewed them down, one might believe the blood of these dead trees started afresh at the touch of their murderer.

During the "breathing spell" which comes between the finishing of spring's and the beginning of summer's work on the farm, the path-master

warns out the farmers to the performance of the farce termed, by stretch of courtesy, "road-mending," which is played regularly twice a year, when all hands turn out with teams, ploughs, scrapers and wagons, spades, shovels, and hoes and make good roads bad and bad roads worse. It is fortunate for those who travel much upon the highways that these road-menders do so little, playing at work for a short time, then stopping, leaning on plough-handle or spade to hold grave consultation concerning the ways of doing some part of their task, or gathering about the water-jug in the shade of a wayside tree, and spending an unconscionable time in quenching their thirst and lighting their pipes and joking or discussing some matter of neighborhood gossip.

But the young corn is showing in rows of green across the dark mould that the time for the first hoeing has come. The long-suffering boy bestrides old Dobbin and guides him between the rows while he drags back and forth the plough or cultivator, held, most likely, by one too apt to blame the boy for every misstep of the horse which crushes beyond resurrection a hill of corn. It is my opinion that to this first odious compulsory equitation entailed upon the boys of my generation is due the falling into disuse of equestrianism in New England. Who that had ever ridden a horse at snail's pace among the corn-rows in the

lazy days of early summer when he *knew* he ought to be catching the fish or hunting the birds' nests he was dreaming of, instead of being a clothespin to the thin blanket on Dobbin's sharp back and the mark of the sharper tongue of the plough-holder, would ever again of his own free will mount a horse? I can speak for one. Happily this particular boy-torture has gone out of fashion; and in the tillage of hoed crops as in haymaking the horse is guided by the man who cultivates or rakes. After this trio, man, boy, and horse, come the hoers cutting away at the everlasting and ever-present weeds, and stirring and mellowing the soil of the corn or potato hills.

It is likely enough to happen, about these days, that a farmer, having set about the building of a barn and the carpenter having got the frame ready for setting up, invites his neighbors to a "raising," one of the few "bees" remaining of those so common and frequent in the earlier days of interdependence. The young and able-bodied are promptly on hand, and vie with one another in deeds of strength and daring, while the old men, exempt from the warfare of life, sit apart on a pile of rafters or sleepers, anon giving sage advice, recounting their youthful exploits, and contrasting the past with the present; seldom, albeit, to the great honor of modern times or men. The labor ended, cakes, pies, cheese, and cider are

served, and these comfortably disposed of, the jolly company disperse.

One kind of "bee," as these gatherings for mutual help are called, which has only lately gone out with the oxen, who were the chief actors in it, was the "drawing bee." A farmer, having cause to change the site of a barn or other structure, would, with the carpenter's help, usually in early spring, but sometimes in the fall, get runners under his building. These were long timbers of something more than the building's length, cut with an upward slope at the forward end. Having properly braced the inside of his barn, to withstand the rack of transportation, all his oxen-owning neighbors were bidden to his aid. The yokes of oxen were hitched in two "strings," one to each runner, and, all being ready, were started off at the word of command, amid a clamor of "Whoa-hush!" "Whoa-haw!" and "Gee!" addressed to the Bucks, Broads, Stars, Brindles, and Brights, who were the motive power, the creaking of the racked frame and the shrill shouts of the boys, without whose presence nothing of such moment ever is, if it ever could be, done.

The barn being safely set in its new place, the bee ended in feasting and jollification. Now that oxen have become so scarce it would need the mustering of a whole county to provide the necessary force. In the old times there were also

“logging bees,” and others, which have fallen into disuse.

After hoeing, the deluge — for the sheep; for they must be washed preparatory to shearing, which important event in their and farm life now draws near. In some pool of a stream, or sheltered cove of a pond or lake, where the water is hip-deep, or under the outpouring stream from a tapped mill-flume, or the farmer’s own pond made for this especial purpose, they suffer this cleansing.

Huddled in a pen they are taken by the catcher as called for and carried to the washers, and, passing from their hands, stagger, water-logged and woe-begone, up the bank to rejoin their dripping comrades, and doubtless pass the hours while their fleeces are drying in mutual condolment over man’s inhumanity to sheep.

Within a fortnight or so after this comes the shearing. The farmer engages the service of as many as he needs of his neighbors and their sons as are skillful shearers. The barn floor and its overhanging scaffolds are carefully swept. The skies are watched for the day and night preceding the first day of shearing, lest a sudden shower should wet the sheep, which, if so threatened, must be got to the shelter of the barn. If this forethought has not been needed in the early morning of the great day, all the available force is mustered, such farmhands as can be spared from the

milking, the boys roused from their morning nap, and some helpful, timely coming shearers, to get the sheep home from the pastures. Then the sun salutes with his first rays as they encompass the sheep on the dry knoll where they have slept, and call and drive them homeward across the pasture and through the lane to the barnyard.

Who shall tell the waywardness of sheep! How they will come to one when not called or wanted, but will flee from the caller when wanted as if he were a ravening wolf; how they will peer suspiciously at the gap or gateway through which they should go, as if on the thither side were lurking dire perils; or how they will utterly ignore it and race past it at headlong speed, unheeding the shaking of salt-dish and the most persuasive "ca-day," and how surely they will discover the smallest break in a fence through which they should not go, and go scrambling through it, or over a wall, pell-mell, like a charging squadron of horse, as, if not possessed with the devil himself, possessed, at least, with the fear that he, or something more terrible than he to ovine imagination, will surely take the hindmost. But the patience with which they endure shearing is a virtue which covers many of their sins. Seldom struggling much, though they are held continually in unnatural positions, on the side with the neck under the shearer's knee, or on the rump with the neck

bent over his knee or pilloried between his legs. Surely the sheep was made to be shorn. Fancy any other domestic animal undergoing the process. What comes of pig-shearing is proverbial.

From the barn, so silent since foddering ended, issues now a medley of sounds — the loud bleating of the ewes, in tones as various as human voices, and the higher-pitched lamentations of the lambs, bewailing their short separation, the castanet-like click of the shears, loud jests and merry laughter, the outcry of the alarmed swallows cleaving the upper darkness of the ridge, where within feather-lined mud walls their treasures lie.

Ranged along the floor, each in his allotted place, are the three, four, or half-dozen or more shearers, bending each over his sheep, which, under his skillful hand, shrinks rapidly from umber plumpness to creamy-white thinness, undergoing a change so great that, when released, she goes leaping forth into the yard, her own lamb hardly knows her. At his table, with a great reel of twine at his elbow, is the tier, making each fleece into a compact bundle. At the stable-door is the alert catcher, ready with an unshorn sheep as each shorn one is let go; and these, with a boy to pick up scattered locks, constitute the working force.

Neighbors drop in to lounge an hour away in the jolly company, to take a pull at the cider pitcher, or engage shearers for their own shearing.

The wool buyer makes his rounds, and the boys come to see the shearing, to get in everybody's way, and beg cuts of sheep-twine. The farmhouse affords its best for the shearing dinner, which has long been an honored festival in New England.

But the cheap wool-growing of the great West has well-nigh put an end to this industry here. Flocks have become few and small, and herds of Alderneys or shorthorns feed where formerly great flocks of Merinos nibbled the clover. Shepherds have turned dairymen. Those who practice the shearers' craft year by year become scarcer, and the day seems not far off when this once great event of our year will live only in the memory of old men.

The silvery green of the rye-fields, and the darker green of the winter wheat, and the purple bloom of the herds' grass, grow billowy under the soft winds of July with waves that bear presage of harvesting and haymaking.

In fields red and white with clover and daisy, the strawberries have ripened, and have drawn a flavor, the essence of wildness, from the free clouds that shadowed them, from the songs of the bobolinks and meadowlarks that hovered over them, from bumble-bee and skimming swallow, from the near presence of the nightly prowling fox — a flavor that no garden fruit possesses. To pick these is not so much a labor as a pastime for

the women and children who go out to gather them under such blue skies and amid such bloom of clover, daisy, and buttercup, and sung to so cheerily by the jolly bobolink.

About the Fourth of July haying begins. The rank growth about the barns is hand-mowed, and the mowing-machine is trundled out from its rusting idleness, and, being tinkered into readiness, goes jingling and clattering afield, where, having fairly got at its work, it gnaws down with untiring tooth its eight or ten acres a day. The incessant unmodulated "chirr" of this modern innovator has almost banished the ancient music of the whetted scythe, a sound that for centuries had been as much a part of haymaking as the fragrance of the newmown hay. But its musical voice cannot save it. The old scythe must go, and we cannot deny that the noisy usurper is a blessing to us all in lightening labor, and, not least among us, to the boy, for whom I cherish a kindly feeling, and for any softening of whose lot I am thankful.

In the days before mowing-machines, hordes of Canadian French swarmed over the borders to work in haying, in crews of two or three, jiggling southward in their rude carts, drawn by tough, shaggy little ponies. They were doughty workmen in the field and at the table; merry-hearted and honest fellows, too; for, when they departed, they seldom took, beside their wages, more than

a farming tool or two, or the sheets from their beds, doubtless as mementoes of their sojourn in the States. But the Batistes and Antoines and innumerable Joes and Pierres bide on their own arpents now all the summer through and come to us no more. If we miss them, with their baggy trousers and gay sashes, the shuffle of their moccasined feet and their sonorous songs that had always a touch of pathos in them, we do not mourn for them.

As the cut grass dries under the downright beams of the summer sun and becomes ready for the raking, the windrows (always "winrows," here) lengthen along the shaven sward as the horse-rake goes back and forth across the meadow, and the workmen following with forks soon dot the fields with cocks if the hay is to wait to-morrow's drawing, or with less careful tumbles if it goes to barn or stack to-day.

Now the wagon comes surmounted by its rattling "hay-riggin'," with the legs of the pitcher and the unfortunate who "mows away" and "rakes after" dangling over its side, and the man who loads, the captain, pilot, and stevedore of this craft, standing forward driving his horses, for the oxen and cart, too slow for these hurrying times, have lumbered into the past. The stalwart pitcher upheaves the great forkfuls, skillfully bestowed by the loader, till they have grown into a load

which moves off with ponderous stateliness across the meadow to the stack or barn. Seen from astern as it sways and heaves along its way, one might fancy it an enormous elephant with a Yankee mahout on its back.

In the middle of the long afternoon is luncheon-time, when all hands gather in the shade of tree or stack or barn and fortify themselves with gingerbread and cheese. Showers interrupt, foreshadowed by pearly mountains of "thunderheads" that uplift themselves above the more material mountains of earth which are soon veiled with the blue-black film of the coming rain, when there is bustle in the hay-field, rapid making of cocks that are no sooner made than blown over by the rain-gust, and drivers shouting to their teams hurrying to shelter with their loads. And days arrive when from morning till night the rain comes steadily down, stopping all outdoor work. Then some go a-fishing or to lounge in the village store, or perhaps all gather in the barn to chat and joke and doze away the dull hours on the fragrant hay. Some harvesting intervenes and the cradles swing in the fields of rye and wheat with graceful sweep and musical ring. The binders follow and soon the yellow shocks are ranked along the field whence they go duly to the barn.

When the night-hawk circles through the evening sky, now uttering his harsh note, anon plung-

ing downward with a sound like the twanging of the bass strings of some great instrument, and the August piper begins his shrill, monotonous concert, and the long shadows crawl eastward across the meadows where the rusty-breasted robins are hopping in quest of supper, the toilworn farmer looks forth upon his shaven sward with its shapely stacks all ridged and penned, and upon the yellow stubble of his shorn grain-fields, and is glad that the fret and labor of haying and harvesting are over.

Soon the nights have a threat of frost in their increasing chilliness; birds have done singing and there is the mournfulness of speedy departure in their short, business-like notes. The foam of the buckwheat-fields, upborne on stems of crimson and gold, is flecked with pale green and brown kernels, inviting the cradler. The blond tresses of the corn are grown dark; the yellow kernels begin to show through the parted husks and the cutting of this most beautiful of grains begins. The small forest of maize becomes an Indian village whose wigwams are corn-shocks, in whose streets lie yellow pumpkins with their dark vines trailing among the pigeon-grass and weeds. The pumpkin, New England's well-beloved and the golden crown of her Thanksgiving feast, might be her symbolic plant, as Old England's rose and Scotland's thistle are theirs. How the adventurous vine,

rough, prickly, and somewhat coarse, even in its flowers, wanders forth from its parent hill, through bordering wilderness of aftermath and over Rocky Mountains of walls, overcoming all and bearing golden fruit afar off, yet always holding on to the old home, Yankee-like, and drawing its sap and life therefrom!

Whether or not the frost has come to blacken the leaves of the pumpkins, squashes, and cucumbers and to hasten the ripening of the foliage, the trees are taking on the autumnal colors. The ash shows the first grape-bloom of its later purple, the butternut is blotched with yellow, and the leaves of the hickory are turning to gold; and though the greenness of the oaks and some of the sugar-maples and elms still endures, the sumacs along the walls and the water-maples and pepperidges in the lowlands are red with the consuming fires of autumn. The yellow flame of the goldenrods has burned out and the paler lamps of the asters are lighted along the fences and woodsides.

The apples are growing too heavy to hold longer to the parent branch, and, with no warning but the click of intercepting leaves, tumble, perhaps, on the head of some unprofitable dreamer even in practical New England. They are ready for gathering, and the Greenings, Northern Spies, Spitzenbergers, Russets, Pomeroy's, and Tallman Sweets, and all whose virtues or pretensions have gained

them a name, are plucked with the care befitting their honored rank and stored for winter use or market, while their plebeian kindred, the "common" or "natural" apples, are unceremoniously beaten with poles or shaken from their scraggy, untrimmed boughs and tumbled into the box of the farm-wagon to go lumbering off to the cider-mill. This, after its ten or eleven months of musty emptiness and idleness, has now awakened to a short season of bustle, of grinding and pressing and fullness of casks and heaped bins and the fragrance thereof. Wagons are unloading their freight of apples and empty barrels, and departing with full casks after the driver has tested the flavor and strength of the earliest-made cider. And now at the cellar hatchway of the farmhouse, the boy and the new-come cider-barrel may be found in conjunction with a rye straw for the connecting link.

The traveling thresher begins to make the round of the farms and establishes his machine on the barn floor, whence belch forth, with resounding din, clouds of dust in which are seen dimly the forms of the workmen and the laboring horses climbing an unstable hill whose top they never reach. Out of the dust-cloud grows a stack of yellow straw alongside the gray barn, which it almost rivals in height and breadth when the threshing is ended.

About apple-picking time, and for a month or two after, "apple cuts" or "paring bees" used to be frequent, when all the young folks of a neighborhood were invited, never slighting the skilled parer with his machine. After some bushels of apples were pared, quartered, cored, and strung for drying, the kitchen was cleared of its rubbish of cores and skins, and after a feast of "nut-cakes," pumpkin pies, and cider, the plays began to the tunes of "Come, Philander, le's be marchin'," "The needle's eye that doth supply the thread that runs so true," and "We're marchin' onwards towards Quebec where the drums are loudly beatin'," or the fiddle or "Lisha's" song of "Tol-liddle, tol-liddle, tol-lo-day, do-day-hum, do-day-hum, tolli-day," set all feet to jiggling "Twin Sisters," or "French four." These jolly gatherings, though by many years outliving the old-fashioned husking bee, have at last fallen into disuse, and their hearty New England flavor is poorly supplied by the insipid sociables and abominable surprise parties that are now in vogue.

The husking bees, in which girls took a part, when a red ear was a coveted treasure, are remembered only by the old; but the rollicking parties of men that gathered to husk in the fields by moonlight or firelight, or by lantern-light in the barns that rang again with their songs and noisy

mirth, held a notable place in our farm life till within a decade or two of years. But they, too, have passed away, and husking has grown to be a humdrum, workday labor, though not an unpleasant one, whether the spikes of gold are un-sheathed in the field in the hazy warmth of an October day, or in the barn when the fall rain is pattering on the roof and making brown puddles in the barnyard. In these days the cows are apt to come late to the milking, for the cow-boy loiters by the way to fill his pocket with hickory-nuts, or crack a hatful of butternuts on the big stone, which, with some small ones for hammers, seem always to be set under every butternut-tree.

The turkeys wander far and wide grasshopper-hunting over the meadows, whereon the gossamer lies so thick that the afternoon sun casts a shimmering sunglade across them, and go nutting along the edge of the woods where the slender fingers of the beeches are dropping their light burden of golden leaves and brown mast.

Long, straggling columns of crows are moving southward by leisurely aerial marches, and at night and morning the clamor of their noisy encampments disturbs the woods. Most of the summer birds have gone. A few robins, hopping silently among the tangle of wild grapevines, and flocks of yellowbirds, clad now in sober garments and uttering melancholy notes as they glean the

seeds of the frostbitten hemp, are almost the only ones left. There are no songs of birds now, nor any flowers but here and there in the pastures an untimely blooming dandelion, and in the almost leafless woods the pink blossoms of herb Robert and the pale yellow flowers of the witch-hazel.

The last potato is dug and stored, the buckwheat drawn and threshed, the last pumpkin housed, and the cattle have begun to receive their daily allowance of corn-fodder. People begin to feel a pride in the increasing cold, and compare weather notes and speculate and prophesy concerning the coming of winter. The old farmhouse is made ready for winter. Its foundations are again reinforced with banking, its outside windows and storm-doors are set on their long guard of the winter weather, and all the sons and daughters of the old house have gathered from far and near to hold the New England (now the national) feast of Thanksgiving, and have dispersed. The last wedge of wild geese has cloven the cold sky. There is a wintry roar in the wind-swept hills, and as the first snowflakes and the last sere leaves come eddying down together our year of farm life ends.

SOBAPSQUA

FROM the Vermont mainland in the township of Charlotte, a long cape, toothed with minor points and indented with small bays, reaches far westward toward the bald promontory of Split Rock. The cape is fringed with woods, and terminates in a bold cliff, crowned with cedars, pines, and deciduous trees.

In it is embalmed the name of a man otherwise forgotten. No one knows who Thompson was, but it is probable that he was the first settler here, and that a scraggy orchard, intergrown with cedars, and the barely traceable foundations of a house, were his, and that some crumbling lines of stone wall mark the divisions of his sterile fields.

Doubtless the poverty of this soil prevented a succession of occupants and the consequent succession of names which so many of our points and bays have undergone. "Thompson's Point" is not a good name for a noble headland, but it is better that it should have borne it for a hundred years than half a dozen that are no more significant.

The Waubanakees called it "Kozoapsqua," the "Long Rocky Point," and the noticeable cleft promontory opposite "Sobapsqua," the "Pass

through the Rock," names which might well have been retained, and perhaps would have been if our pioneer ancestors had not so bitterly hated the Indians and all that pertained to them. There was cause enough for this hatred, but one wishes it had not been carried so far when the poverty of our ancestors' nomenclature is considered and the few surviving names of Indian origin remind us how easily we might have been spared the iteration of commonplace and vulgar names that cling to mountain, river, and lake.

Sobapsqua and Kozoapsqua make the gateway to the broader expanse of water stretching thence to Canada. It is one through which many memorable expeditions have passed—unrecorded war parties of Iroquois and Waubanakee, the brave and devout Champlain on his voyage of discovery with his Indian allies, the predatory bands of French and Indians marching over the ice-bound lake, the armies of France bearing her banners to victory or trailing them homeward from defeat. Here passed Rogers and his rangers to wreak vengeance on those scourges of New England, the Waubanakees of Saint Francis, and then Amherst's army passing from lesser conquests to the final and crowning victory. A few years later the little army of Americans went through these portals to its disastrous campaign in Canada, and the ensuing winter saw Warner and his rangers

march down the frozen lake to the succor of their hard-pressed brethren; the following summer, the same brave commander bearing homeward the feeble remnant of the Northern army.

Here Arnold's flotilla passed on its way to the bloody battle at Valcour, and here the escaping vessels were overtaken by Carleton's fleet and the running fight began which ended at Arnold's Bay. Through this broad gateway came Burgoyne's unreturning host. Ticonderoga fell, and henceforth till the close of the war British warships passed and repassed in undisputed possession of the lake whose waters mirrored no flag but the red cross of England. Then it vanished from them till it reappeared when Captain Pring's flotilla made its unsuccessful assault on Fort Cassin, at the mouth of the Otter, in which McDonough's unready fleet lay moored. Next day the Stars and Stripes flashed past these headlands as the gallant fleet sailed down the lake to its eventual glorious victory in Plattsburg Bay.

Thus, for two centuries, such shifting scenes of war passed in broken succession before these steadfast sentinels. Then came the peaceful sails of commerce, white-winged schooners and sloops, the single square canvas of Canadian craft; immense lumber rafts, coaxed slowly northward by sweep and sail; the first clumsy steamboat, making tortoise-like progress, followed in a little while

by majestic successors, tearing the still waters asunder and casting the torn waves against either rocky shore.

In the later, pleasant days of autumn canoes of the Waubanakees reappeared, like apparitions of the old days, rounding the ancient headland, and making into the great "Bay of the Vessels" straight for Wonakakatukese, Sungahneetuk or Paumbowk, the old trapping-grounds of the wild fathers of these peaceable men, coming now with no bloodier intent than warfare against the muskrats, while their women made baskets and moccasins to hawk about the countryside. The oldest men could repeat the legends of ancient wars with the Iroquois and knew the old names of rivers, mountains, and lakes, and still made offering to Wojahose, the invisible deity of the lake, as they paddled in awed silence past the lonely rock wherein dwelt the master of storms.

Fifty years ago some one discovered that the reefs off Thompson's Point were good fishing-grounds for pike-perch, and they became a favorite resort of anglers. To take advantage of the late and early fishing it was a common custom to camp on the Point overnight. For the most part the fishermen camped in primitive fashion. They slept on beds of cedar twigs under rude shelters of cedar boughs and cooked their simple fare, with few utensils, over an open fire. Occasionally a

party brought a tent and lived more luxuriously under canvas during a longer outing. At last a goodly guild of honest anglers built an unpretentious but comfortable clubhouse with two rooms on the ground floor, one of which was kitchen, dining-room, and living-room, the other a sleeping-apartment fitted up with two tiers of bunks, which were supplemented by others in the loft. There were a cook-stove, a big coffee-pot, kettles, and more than one capacious frying-pan, also a table and seats, but the primitive character of a genuine camp was still maintained. Everything was conducted in a free-and-easy manner, without any attempt at style or luxurious living.

To supply the demands of the frying-pans and for sport, which, though dull as watching a runaway for deer, quite satisfied their modest desires, these men anchored their boats on the reefs and fished from daybreak to nightfall with the philosophical patience of honest anglers. When the fish were biting well there was lively work hauling in the sixty or one hundred feet of line hand over hand, with a stout pike-perch and a strong current to fight against, but when there was a long time between bites it was dull enough. A stiff cedar pole with wire guides and a cleat at the butt to wind the line on was the approved tackle by which the fish was brought to boat in the briefest possible time.

If the fishing was not conducted in the finest style of the art it fulfilled all the requirements of these anglers, and there were jolly gatherings around the camp-fire, whether it blazed in the free air or roared within the rusty iron walls of the stove.

In those days the Point afforded good fox-hunting, as in days long before when Uncle Bill Williams and the old Meaches hunted there with their gaunt, melodious-voiced, old-fashioned hounds and were succeeded by Uncle Bill's sons, John Thorpe, and others of a generation of Nimrods, who, in turn, have departed to happier hunting-grounds than these are now.

We who came later had excellent sport, for at least one litter of foxes was sure to be raised there every year, and besides these residents transient visitors were likely enough to be started.

A fox running before hounds would keep a course conforming to the shore-line and thus make the circuit of the Point, crossing from one side to the other near the heads of the two bays, and would so repeat the circuit till killed, run to earth, or run off the Point along one or the other shore to the Cove Woods, McNiell's Point, or the hills. A single hunter stood a reasonable chance of getting a shot, while if there were two or more, properly posted, one of these was almost sure of a chance, though by no means so certain of the fox, who sometimes safely ran the gantlet of half a

dozen guns and left as many chopfallen hunters, each excusing himself and blaming the others.

I have painful recollections of being more than once a member of such an awkward squad, mingled with pleasanter memories of occasions when fortune favored us; but somehow the misadventures stand forth most prominently. I well remember one dull-skied November day when I tramped to the Point with no companion but my old hound Gabriel, and ranged the woods almost to the end without finding a track till he came to the old orchard, I being a little behind him, when he sounded such a melodious blast of his trumpet as at once raised my waning hopes and set me all alert. In a moment he had a fox afoot and going around the end of the Point from the south side to the north at a lively rate. There was a bare chance of my getting over to that side in time to intercept him, and I tried my best for it, running *ventre à terre* beside an old wall that crossed the pasture till I came to the belt of woods above the shore. I had not time to catch breath before the fox was seen among the thick shadows of the trees, in black relief against the light beyond, and I made a snap shot at him. He tumbled all in a heap into a clump of cedar-trunks, but before I could get to him he picked himself up and staggered into a thicket, whither I followed close at his heels making futile snatches at his brush, a foot or so beyond

my reach. Having the advantage of slipping through intricacies that I floundered against, he was gaining on me a little, when Gabriel overhauled us and pounced upon him with a grip that took the life out of the poor fox, yet not soon enough to prevent one vengeful nip in the nose of his slayer. Gabriel's angelic name came of his voice, not of his temper, which was so kindled by this last thrust of his foe that the handsome skin was in danger of being spoiled before I could get the fox away from him. When I began taking off the pelt he curled himself up for a comfortable nap, but a fresh twinge of his wounded nose suddenly rekindled his smouldering wrath, and snatching the fox out of my hands he gave it another violent shaking, and I had to be severe with him before he would let me finish.

This done, we set forth in the homeward direction along the belt of woods on the north shore. We had not gone far before Gabriel found a track that engaged his earnest attention, whereof he made loud proclamation while it led him across the wide pasture to the woods of Cedar Point, which is the southernmost headland of the cape and the largest piece of woods upon it. In a moment the woods were filled with quick reverberations of the hound's melodious voice. Assured that the fox was afoot and that there was no time to lose, I put my best foot forward for the corner of a fence which

ran across nearly to the woods and divided the pasture from a meadow. The desired point was scarcely reached when I saw the fox break cover, a tawny dot in the woodside, now growing and growing into distinctive form as it rapidly drew nearer along a cowpath that ran close beside the fence. Now he was not more than two gunshots from me, the butt of the gun was at my shoulder, my finger touching the trigger, and I could almost feel this fellow's pelt in my right pocket comfortably balancing the one in my left, when a herd of young cattle discovered him and charging in a mad stampede drove him through the fence into the meadow, across which he took a diagonal course, well out of my range. I fired with a forlorn hope of crippling him, but only increased the velocity of the ruddy streak which vanished in an instant and left the world a blank.

Presently the leaden sky came closer to the earth, and then became one with it in a dense snowfall, and muffled in its thick veil Gabriel's trumpet notes sounded faintly far away, as he pattered over the blotted scent. The six miles' tramp home was leg-wearying, as all can testify who have taken so long a walk in the first snow, but my luck had been good enough and I should have been satisfied, yet the vanishing form of that fox stood forth then as it stands even now in unpleasant distinctness, clearer than aught else in the day's events.

Immense flocks of ducks used to cruise along the shores and come out on the shelving rocks, sometimes in very dangerous places, where ambushed gunners lay in wait to rake the huddled throng with a charge of BB shot. In some cases a dozen or more were killed by a single discharge. Frank Brady got eighteen with two barrels. Old Justin Cyr killed as many with one discharge of his ancient Queen's arm. This was very unsportsmanlike, and in no wise to be compared with the exploits of men who kill a hundred ducks on the wing in a day's shooting and are still unsatisfied. Our pot-hunters fired but one shot and went home quite content with the result, and from year to year there was no noticeable decrease in the numbers of waterfowl till the generation of "true sportsmen" with improved weapons began to multiply.

It is not to be denied that there is a degree of excitement in the stealthy approach to a flock of wary, dusky ducks, or in lying in wait, silent and motionless, for them to swim within range, meanwhile observing the autumnal beauty of earth and sky out of the corners of one's eyes, sniffing the fragrant odor of ripe leaves, and listening to the pulse of lazy ripples, and undeniably there is a satisfaction in the successful shot. Nevertheless it was pot-hunting that one should blush with shame for having indulged in, yet somehow I do

not, only as the recollection of some inexcusably bad shot comes back to me.

I am glad I do not know how a man feels after shooting a hundred ducks that have flown past his stand or stooped to his decoys in one day. It seems to me that one should feel remorse rather than exultation for such a feat.

The beautiful island in the north bay which was called Birch Island when I first knew it, clad then with a thick growth of white birch and cedar, was a beloved resort of ducks, and its secluded shores were seldom disturbed by gunners. By change of ownership its name became Yale's, then Holmes's, and is now Putnam's after the present owner, who has a handsome summer house there and has so improved the place that the wild ducks have forsaken it.

I think this may be the place where the devoted missionary, Isaac Jogues, ran the gantlet and suffered other tortures from his savage captors while he and his fellow-captives were being carried to the Mohawk country, for though by no means situated on the southern part of the lake, it is the southernmost island which answers at all the description given of the halting-place of the war party, by Parkman, in his "The Jesuits in North America":

"On the eighth day they learned that a large Iroquois war party, on their way to Canada, were

near at hand; and they soon approached their camp, on a small island near the southern end of Lake Champlain. The warriors, two hundred in number, saluted their victorious countrymen with volleys from their guns; then, armed with clubs and thorny sticks, ranged themselves in two lines, between which the captives were compelled to pass up the side of a rocky hill. On the way they were beaten with such fury that Jogues, who was last in the line, fell powerless, drenched in blood and half dead. As the chief man among the French captives, he fared the worst. His hands were again mangled, and fires applied to his body; while the Huron chief, Eustache, was subjected to tortures even more atrocious. When, at night, the exhausted sufferers tried to rest, the young warriors came to lacerate their wounds and pull out their hair and beards.”

One can hardly realize that scenes now so steeped in the serenity of peace should ever have witnessed such barbarities.

The shores of this island can no longer tempt me, as they once did years and years ago, to steal a boat wherewith to get close to the congregation of ducks assembled in and about them on that October Sunday. My companion and I broke two commandments and were not penitent, but I trust Heaven forgave us, for we were only boys and returned the boat just as we found it,

and got nine lusty, dusky ducks, half as big as geese.

John Hough, an old man whose memory ran back to the last days of deer-hunting here, told me that the deer, started on Mount Philo, used to run to water at Thompson's Point, as the lay of the land would lead one to guess.

Here the relentless slayers of the last deer lay in wait for their prey, while, faint and far away, the hound's first notes drifting down the wind-blown crest of Mount Philo, then swelling to a jangle of echoes in the nearer woods, the hunted deer plunged into the lake and the rifle spat out its spiteful charge, or the long smooth-bore belched forth its double charge of ball and buckshot, and the rocky steps of Sobapsqua, offering life and safety, faded out of the glazing eyes.

The days of the deer were long ago when the Point was still a half wilderness, and the days of the fox and the wild duck are almost fallen into the past, for the place has become a fashionable resort, and is populous with deluded people who imagine themselves to be camping out. In fact, they live luxuriously in furnished cottages, with carpets on their floors and cushioned chairs, and have dinners of divers courses, with napery of fine linen and service of choice ware. I am told that they not only undress to go to bed at night, but that the women-folk actually change their

elegant apparel two or three times during the day. Poor souls! little they know of the freedom of real camp-life, the comfort of one shabby suit that does service day and night, the disenthralment from the care of tableware, and the cleansing of many utensils from over-neatness and punctilious etiquette, but yet not from true politeness.

Scaffolded on matted bedsteads over carpeted floors, how shall they so much as guess what restful sleep comes to him who lies close to the bosom of Mother Earth, with naught between but a blanket and a litter of fragrant cedar twigs? What poor comradeship must there be among those who gather around a black stove, compared with such as encircle the genial blaze of a camp-fire, and how shall those feel themselves near to Nature who are shut from the sky and the woods by wooden walls and roofs?

The best of camp-life is in escaping from the wearisome burdens of civilization and in some measure renewing the old relationship with Nature.

The change has been even greater on the other side of the north bay at Cedar Beach, which has undergone a change of name as well as of character since the time when we followed fugitive foxes from Thompson's Point thither, or made fresh starts among the vulpine residents of its wild seclusion. It was known as McNiell's Point then, after

its pioneer owner, who established a ferry just north of it, which was continued by his descendants with various craft — sloops, horse-boats, and a natty little steamboat. It was a famous thoroughfare until the building of the railroad, which revolutionized everything. Then there were no more great droves of cattle making leisurely progress toward Boston on the hoof, nor any longer much faring to and fro across the ferry on the business of traffic or visiting, and the idle ferryman and the guestless publican lounged on the rotting wharf in mutual condolence.

Yet the little wilderness on the Point, seldom invaded by human kind except the infrequent woodman, the more infrequent meditative woods loungee and the hunter, and throbbing in spring-time with the beat of the partridge's drum, ringing all summer long with the songs of a multitude of birds, echoing in the golden days of autumn with the melody of hounds, still preserved its sylvan seclusion and kept its homely name, till it was discovered by some "hey duc" explorers, who rechristened it and made it fashionable.

Spick-and-span cottages, even elegant residences, are built upon its heights; a steamer comes to it regularly twice a day during the summer, and the thronged woods are noisy with gay pleasure-seekers.

It is all spoiled for us old-fashioned camp-

dwellers, but no more, perhaps, than our barbarous modes would spoil it for these dainty folk. I can imagine how their sensibilities would be shocked at the sight of our uncouth living, our lairs of boughs and blankets, our unnapered table, with the frying-pan serving for platter and common plate, no less than our sense of the fitness of things is hurt by this flaunting of fashion in the face of Nature.

They wonder at our ways, we at theirs, being unable to understand what they can find in all that they enjoy to compensate for what we have lost — the freedom from care and conventionalities that were ours in these wild corners, when the click of the croquet ball, the incongruous jingle of pianos, and the babble of human voices did not overbear the whispers of the wind in the trees, the songs of birds and the soft laps of waves on quiet shores.

BLACK-BASS-FISHING IN SUNGAHNEETUK

AMONG the Vermont rivers emptying into Lake Champlain that were once salmon streams, is the beautiful little river which the Indians named "Sungahneetuk," the "Fishing-Place River." The salmon long since ceased to inhabit any of these, only now and then a straggler being taken even in the lake. Our Fish Commissioners have tried to reestablish the salmon in the rivers he once made famous; but, barred with dams, their unshaded waters heated and shrunken, thick with sawdust and the wash of cultivated lands, and poisoned with chemicals from mills and factories, they have undergone changes too great to allow them again to become his home. They are rivers yet, but not the cool and limpid realms whereof he was lord paramount in the old days, and it is no longer worth his while to battle the swift currents of the Saint Lawrence and run the gantlet of the Richelieu nets to come to his own again.

In Sungahneetuk and in other streams, his ancient heritage, he has a smaller yet worthy successor, almost as game for his size, and ranking high among food-fishes. Hardy, prolific, armed defensively with firm scales and a dorsal bristling

with spines, offensively with stout, sharp teeth set in strong jaws, the black bass holds his own against changed conditions and aquatic enemies, and owns no fish of these waters his master, unless it be the gar-pike, or bill-fish, a fish so invulnerably mailed and murderously weaponed as to be assailed or withstood by no other.

Protection has done wonders for the bass, for all they needed was to be let alone during spawning-time, and wherever the law has been enforced they have greatly increased in numbers. Up to the passage of a protective fish law, in 1874, it had been the common practice here with all who angled, either for pleasure or profit, to catch these fish on their spawning-beds in June. Whoever had eyes sharp enough to spy out the beds under the tangle of ripples and knots of foam in the shallows or beneath the slow current of the translucent gray-green depths had only to cast his hook, no matter how unskillfully masked with a worm, and the alert parent fish would rush to remove the intruder from the sacred precincts, seizing it in her mouth and dropping it well outside the bed, if left to have her own way with it. But just in the nick of time the angler came in, and, striking, fastened his fish, which ten times to one was hauled forth at once by stout pole and line, without a chance for life, to spend her strength in useless threshing of the daisies and clover. It was not always done in this

butcherly manner, but it was done in some way by almost every one who fished at all, and at best was a miserable business.

The undiscovered and fruitful beds were few, the barren and orphaned ones many, and if the streams had been their only spawning-places the bass must have been almost exterminated by such continual persecution. But of the many adventuring through stress of nature up the rivers some would escape, and there were the reefs and bars of the lake, where others might breed undisturbed by man, and so, among them all, perpetuate their race until the day of deliverance.

The bass, having hibernated in the depths during the dead months, come on to the spawning-grounds in May, and shortly after set about making their beds, which, when finished, are shallow concavities, in diameter about twice the length of the fish, and from the time of completion till the hatching of the eggs are most vigilantly guarded and kept scrupulously clean. The eggs, which are attached to the bottom by a glutinous coating, are hatched in about two weeks after they are deposited. If a pebble or waterlogged chip or twig is washed onto the bed, it is as quickly removed as is the hook of the angler, and all animate intruders are summarily driven off. The infant bass, at their first hatching, are as black and unpromising as a swarm of polliwogs in a mud-puddle, but

they soon disperse, and grow rapidly, and early show their blood, for, long before fall, little fellows an inch and a half in length may be seen chasing minnows as big as themselves. When the spawning-season is well over and the law off, the bass have returned to the lake; but in the few days spent by them in the stream before spawning and the beginning of the close time, the angler is given a chance to take them in a perfectly legitimate manner. It is of one of these days' fishing along this beautiful stream, that, if not done very scientifically or with costly tackle, yet was not unfairly done, that I have to tell.

Sungahneetuk winds its first slender thread around the ledges of the western slope of the Green Mountains, but soon gathers to it the strands of brooks spun out from ponds and swamps and springs, and in a little while becomes strong enough for the turning of mills. Many of these of different kinds are lodged beside it, grinding grist for the food of men, weaving cloth for their raiment, sawing boards for their cradles, shelter, and coffins. These three kinds of mills are all in a huddle, along with stores and shoemakers' and blacksmiths' shops, at Nutting's Curse, the lowest falls now so used, as if they had drifted down stream and grounded there, three miles above where the widened stream is woven into the broad sheet of Champlain.

Half a mile below these mills, on a sunny morn-

ing of a mid-May day, I begin my fishing. The river has drawn itself from the narrow environment of hills, and winds among intervalles ankle-deep with young grass, where newly turned-out kine are feeding greedily and new-come bobolinks are loudly rejoicing. By a thicket of alders, broadly margining and overhanging quiet waters, where foam-bells moulded in the last rapids swing in the slow eddies, I put my rod together. It is of hardhack, hop hornbeam, ironwood, lever-wood — well, *Ostrya Virginica*, a wood which I have long believed the best of our native trees for rod-making — and I have had it made for me by a cunning workman. It is in three pieces and of unorthodox length — fifteen feet. The books say eight feet is the proper length for a bass-rod; but how could one reach over these alders or the thickets of willows lower downstream with such a stick? The slender line is rove through the guides, the hook with its gut snell bent on, and Monsieur Ruisseau, sometime since of Canada, comes forward with the bait-kettle — “minny-pail,” we call it. He dives therein halfway to his elbows more than once to no purpose, for lively minnows are slippery customers, but at last brings out a chub, a three-inch ingot, half of silver, half of brown dross, as triumphantly as if he had landed a salmon, remarking, as he hands it over, “Dar! I’ms got de coss. He’s nice leetly feller, don’t it?”

Indeed he is, and I breathe a silent prayer for him and myself as I impale the little wretch just forward of the dorsal. May a big bass take him speedily, and may I be forgiven for my cruelty! This baiting the hook is the wickedness of fishing that one is sorry for. Five minutes later one is apt to be angry with the tortured, gasping wretch because he does not swim deeper. This one is most obedient to my wishes, and at once sounds the depths, where I tenderly cast him just under the bank at my feet. The slack of the line is slowly taken up, till I can feel the faint tug of his laborious swimming, and with bated breath I watch and wait to feel the stronger tug of a bass seizing him. It does not come, and I cast again and again, far and near, with no stronger responses, till it begins to grow doubtful whether there are any bass here, or, at least, any hungry ones.

I lose interest a little in the water, and take time to note how thickly the dandelions are dotting the grass and setting in their gold the amethyst tufts of violets; how the bobolinks are rollicking over them and the sparrows trilling their happy songs; how busy the robins are with their nest-building, their short play-day already ended; then how all these marginal thickets of alder and willow are bent downstream with the stress of the spring floods, and even the topmost twigs are clothed with knots of begrimed leaves and looped wisps of

grass of last year's growth. I note, too, the fresh-water flotsam here stranded, of chips, cobs, slabs, bits of board, and rails from upstream mills and farms, with a child's rude toy boat, dismantled and unhelmed in its wild voyage, grounded on its ant-hill Ararat, while some little chap among the hills is yet searching the pebbly shores and, with as fond, vain hopes as ours, shading his eyes to descry his small ship sailing back from Spain. Here is a paddle gone adrift from its boat, and the cover of a minnow-can, with rusting hasp and hinges still clinging to it — signs of boatmen and fishermen in upper waters.

Ruisseau has grown listless too, and for the last five minutes has given me no advice nor made any disparaging comments on my rod and line, which he thinks too slender. When *he* goes fishing he has a spar of white cedar for a rod and corresponding cordage for a line. "Dat's de way I'ms feesh in Canady." He has changed the water in the bait-kettle, and is taking his ease on the grass, with his pipe in full blast, the fumes pervading a cubic acre of May-day air. Suddenly a snap and splash under the farther bank brings him upright and alert and recalls me from the borders of dream-land. "Dar! Dar! Pull off you' line an' trow him ove' dar," pointing with both hands, one emphasized with his black pipe, to the widening circles.

Meekly obedient to my hired master, I make a

long cast, and, as much by luck as skill, deliver my minnow, now almost at his last gasp, in the middle of the concentric rings of wavelets. Scarcely has his fall startled the reflections of bank, bush, and grass-tuft to livelier dancing, when the surface is again broken by a sullen seething, in the midst of which is dimly seen the shining green broadside of a bass. The time given him for gorging the bait seems nearer five minutes than the quarter of one during which the line vibrates with slight jerks and then tightens with a steady pull as I strike, and an angry tug tells me that he is fast. Now the line cuts the water with a tremulous swish, and the rod bends like a bulrush in a gale, as the stricken fish battles upstream in a wide sweep, then shoots to the surface and three feet into the air, an emerald rocket, showering pearls and crystals. I do not know whether I let my "rod straighten" or "pull him over into the water," but somehow he gets back there without having rid himself of the barbed unpleasantness in his jaw, and then makes a rush downstream, varied with sharp zigzags, ending in another aerial flight as unavailing as the first. Then he bores his way toward a half-sunken log, thinking to swim under it and so get a dead strain on the line; but a steady pull stops him just short of it. Then he sounds the depths to rub the hook out on the bottom, for he is a fellow of expedients; but the spring of the rod lifts him above

this last help. He has exhausted his devices, and now makes feeble rushes in small circles and zig-zags and a final nerveless leap not half his length out of water. He has fought valiantly for life and liberty, but fortune has been against him. After a few more abortive struggles, he turns up his side to the sky, and is towed, almost unresistingly, alongside the bank. Ruisseau lifts him out triumphantly, swearing, Catholic though he is, by a Puritan saint: "Ba John Roger! Dat's de bes' 'snago I have ketch in my remember!" We test his weight with our eyes and forefingers, and put it at four pounds. Fairbanks's and Howe's contrivances might make it less by a pound or more; but they are unsatisfactory scales for anglers' use.

The hook is rebaited, and a cast made beside the sunken log, and quickly answered by a petulant little bite that robs me of a minnow.

"A cossed leetly rock-bass," Ruisseau says, and advises, "Put a wamm on de hook and ketch 'im off de water."

But the smallest minnow in the pail captures him, and the miserable, bony, greedy, watery, big-mouthed little thief is hauled forth without ceremony. How one can praise him for anything but his moderate beauty, the only virtue he has, is a wonder to me. The despised sunfish is handsomer, a better table-fish, and as great a nuisance, yet no one praises *him*. Doubtless the rock-bass has left

a half-dozen of his thievish brethren in ambush behind him, and, rather than bother with them, I move on.

The next fish that tries to rob me of a bait intended for his betters and is sent grazing for his tricks is a perch — a far handsomer fellow, in his bars of gold and dusky green, than the little bass, and, to my taste, worth a dozen of him on the table.

So we fare downstream, taking here and there a bass of the right sort from deep holes, under banks, and in mid-channel, and from the slack-water on the lower side of the boulders, in no particularly different way from that in which the first was taken. Some are ingloriously lost: but the bass should not be grudged their share of the sport, which must lie in foiling the angler's arts. Besides, the fish that is hooked and gets away may live to be caught another day, and for the time of exemption from creel and pan pay interest of a half-pound or more: only one is not apt to fancy such uncertain usury, especially when the fish is of two or three pounds' present worth.

Thus we come to the lower falls, where in old times the incoming salmon doubtless paid heavy tribute to the Indians as they scaled the first rampart of ledges that barred their yearly invasion. This is the last mill-seat on the stream, where not many years ago the screech of the saw was heard

above the rush of waters. It is silent now, its occupation gone. A mossy roof, broken and sagged with the snows of many winters, scantily sheltering reeling posts, unmoving wheels rotting and rusting among weeds and sprouts of willows, and a drift of rotten sawdust, a flume so dry that the sun shines through it and birds build their nests in it, a grassy embankment, and a few ice-battered timbers of the dam feebly reaching out against the flood, are all that are left of the old mill and its once busy life. A half-dozen mouldering logs that came too late for sawing represent its unperformed work, so near did it come to living out its days.

Just below, a little island splits the stream unequally, leaving on that side a shallow rapid scarcely covering the pebbly bottom, on this a deep current that seethes along its swift and narrow way. Into the head of this I cast my bait, and it goes whirling along it, now tossed to the surface, now tumbled along the bottom. For an instant the rod bends and jerks as the slack of the line is taken up by the force of the current, then curves into a drawn bow from tip to reel with a strong, sudden pull that makes the line twang like a bow-string. This is a hungry fellow, who makes no cat's play with his prey, but gorges it at the first snap. How lustily he pulls, with the swirling torrent to help him! If I should lose him, he would go for a four-pounder at least. Keeping a steady

strain on him, but letting him take a little line off the reel and piloting him clear of rocks and roots, I follow him slowly to quieter waters below, where we fight it out, and the land force is victorious. With the utmost tenderness toward the scales, he could not be made to tip them at above two pounds: so I have lost half my fish by saving him.

The next shallow reach of the winding stream leads us toward the blue haze of the Adirondacks, lifted above the tender green of the near woods. At the next, the shorn slopes and bristling ridge of our own Mount Philo front us, and another draws us close to a hillside soft with leafing tamaracks. None of these reaches give any return for careful fishing. Then we come to one most promising of bass, where the deep, slow current slides through an aisle of overhanging basswoods, elms, and ashes, and then under a prostrate trunk, with its catch of driftwood, as promising of fouled hooks, and in neither respect am I disappointed. My minnow has hardly struck the water when it is contended for by three or four hungry bass. In this case the devil takes the foremost, who in a jiffy gets the hook fast in his mouth, and, as he darts this way and that to rid himself of it, is closely followed by his companions — who knows whether envious, curious, or sympathizing? A little later two of them lie with him among the clover. The next cast is

too near the driftwood. The minnow gets among it, and the hook is snagged. Ruisseau helps me out of the scrape with some swearing and a possibly more effective pole, and I suffer no loss but of time, patience, a hook, and part of a snell. The remaining bass can hardly wait for their turn while I am bending on a new hook and rebaiting. They come close to the surface, underseeing the operation, and then in turn they are served out.

The next loop of the stream is cast about a wooded bank, and in it, on a sandy shallow, is a swarm of "rock," or "sand pike," handsome little fellows, with barred sides, the largest among them not exceeding four inches in length. All are hugging the golden, shimmering bottom, casting their spawn and milt.

In a deeper rapid three or four large suckers are heading the swift current, as motionless as if moored there. A boy, with a noose of brass wire at the end of a pole, is trying to snare one, for our suckers are true to their name, and never bite. After much slow and careful maneuvering, he gets it midway inside the noose, and with a vigorous pull throws it out, and there is a happy boy and a most unhappy fish.

Presently we come to the wide, deep pool known as the "Dixon Hole," and under its sheltering elms eat our lunch and moisten it with Sungahneetuk, this year's vintage of mountain snows,

and dry it again with smoke of the Virginian and the ranker Northern weed, home-grown by Ruisseau. The ashes and charred brands of a recent fishing-fire remind him of his favorite sport, concerning which he discourses: "I'd drudder feesh fo' bull-pawt as basses." This he does at night, by the cheerful light of a pine-knot fire, with his spar of cedar and stout line and big hook baited with a tangle of worms, and anchored with a ponderous sinker, the splash of which, when he casts it, rouses echoes out of the circle of gloom which surrounds him. Sometimes he gets a hundred bull-pouts and two or three or more eels. "An' de eel an' de bull-pawt ees de bes' feesh I'ms like, expectin' shad": by which he means to except the white fish of the lake, known here as "lake shad."

Ruisseau having reslain his thousands, I resume actual fishing, and soon behold a monstrous bass, who lounges leisurely up to inspect my bait and then turns contemptuously away. He has an eye upon me through the limpid depths. He is a veteran cruiser of these waters, and knows the tricks of men — a philosopher who can trace effect back to cause, from struggling minnow along line and rod to the guiding hand on shore. Again and again I tempt him, to no purpose, and then reluctantly leave him, to try for less sophisticated fish below, but noting his haunt by a certain bush. A little later I return, making a wide *détour*, and, when I

near the marked bush, drop on my hands and knees, and so get within six feet of the brink without seeing the water or being seen by any of its denizens, and lightly drop my minnow out of sight behind the grassy bank. The trick succeeds: here is a minnow without a man, and the lord of the pool seizes his tribute at sight and is fast at the first snap. Then the tough fibers of the lithe rod are tried to their utmost, first to keep him from gaining the vantage-ground of some sunken logs and brush, then to lead him to a clearer field, when he makes a rush, spinning fifteen yards of retarded line off the reel, and, with a surging leap, flies into the air, shakes the hook from his mouth, and leaves me disconsolate. It is small consolation to think that I have added to his wisdom and that he will not dare touch another minnow for a week — as small as that contained in Ruisseau's "I'ms tole you you'll lost him, sartain." Likely enough before he has forgotten the lesson he will be dragged ashore in an unlawful seine or smitten under the fifth rib by a spearer prowling by torch-light. As ignominious was the death of the last salmon of this stream, which, tradition says, was speared by some boys with a pitchfork, a few turns below here, on a June day sixty years ago.

Slower than the stream flows we follow it where curling deeps promise fruitfulness of fish, trying every foot of such water, sometimes rewarded

with the fulfillment, sometimes not, and faster when the thin, barren current ripples over pebbly and sandy shoals, shortening now and then our course a half-mile by a cross-cut of a few rods.

Climbing the two fences of a road and passing its bridge, and then skirting a wide thicket of willows, we come to a farm-bridge, beside which an aged Quakeress is fishing. Perhaps it has been "borne in upon her" that she should go a-fishing to-day: at any rate, she has been "greatly favored," and shows us with quiet pride a goodly string of fish tethered under the abutment, conspicuous among them the bristling olive backs and golden-green sides of half a dozen fine bass. Looking upon her placid face, one may well believe angling a gentle art if it can draw to it such a saintly devotee. The stream has grown as placid as she, and now winds voiceless between its willowy banks, giving no sign of its flow but by some gliding leaf or twig and the arrowy ripples of dipping branches and mid-stream snags.

Here is a straight reach, hedged on one side with willows tall and low, interwoven with wild grapevines, on the other walled with a green bank topped with a clump of second-growth pines and hemlocks. Looking back through this vista, we see the noble peak of Tawabedeewadso, bright with last winter's snow, shining against the eastern sky.

On the opposite bank I get a glimpse of a rival

fisher stealing warily through the thicket in a coat now rusty and ragged, though two months ago, sleek and glossy enough. Without rod, snare, or spear, the mink is a notable destroyer of fish. Not so silent is the kingfisher that comes jerking his way through the air, sending his rattling cry before him and leaving its echoes clattering far behind him. Now he hangs as if suspended by a thread while he scans the water twenty feet beneath him. Then the thread breaks, and he drops headlong, and, almost before the spray of his plunge has fallen, rises with a little fish on his short spear.

Here, too, minnows are taken in succession by some fish biting differently from a bass, but evidently larger than rock-bass or perch. A third minnow is offered him grudgingly, for frequent drafts and some deaths occurring in spite of half-hourly changes of the water have reduced the little prisoners of the bait-kettle to a dozen. Success has made him bold, and boldness works his ruin, for this time he swallows hook and bait. He swims deeper than the bass, and as stubbornly for a while, but gives up sooner, and, as he is drawn gasping alongside the bank, proves to be a fine pike-perch of two and a half or three pounds' weight. He is not a frequent navigator so far up the stream, but is often caught near the mouth in adjacent Wonakakatuk and in great numbers in the

lake, notably at Kozoapsqua and Sobapsqua. He is handsome, game, and in every way a good fish.

Again my hook gets foul in a drift of brushwood, and Ruisseau, wading out to clear it, again lapses into profanity over his "jim rubbits, half fill of de creek!" With the Canuck, india-rubber is always "jim rubbit."

As the stream is drawn to the level of the lake, its character changes more and more. The sluggish current sweeps slowly under the double-curved branches of great water-maples, whose ice-scarred trunks rise from low banks rank with sedge and wild grass and sloping backward to wide, marshy swamps, where we hear bitterns booming, rails cackling, innumerable frogs piping and croaking, and the fine, monotonous chime of toads, and mysterious voices that may be those of birds or of reptiles supposed to be voiceless. Every streamward-slanting log now has its row of basking turtles that tumble off at our approach, and the little green heron launches as clumsily from his perch in the tall trees and goes flapping before us. Now our way is barred by an impassable outlet of the swamp on one side, and here I catch the last bass of the day.

A swarm of little fish, the biggest not an inch long, come swimming upstream, a school, yards in length, hugging our shore. As here and there a silver side flashes in the sunlight, it is as if a suit

of chain-armor was being drawn through the water. Now a swift bolt strikes it from beneath, and a hundred shining links are driven into the air. In the bubbling swirl beneath the break I see the brazen mail of a bass, and a few feet upstream I drop my minnow, a prey far more tempting than these atoms, and no sooner seen than seized. In the fight that ensues I have some trouble to lead him to a fairer field and a proper place for surrender, to do which he must be got over a sort of boom which serves for a water-fence, being a single pole spanning the stream, in the middle sagging an inch or two below the surface. Shortening my line and raising the tip of the rod, I half lift, half drag him over it, and, after some further skirmishing, bring him to shore, and Ruisseau, wading into the mud halfway to the top of his "jim rubbits" to rescue him, shows himself an artist, making a bas-relief in clay.

As I range the result of my day's sport side by side along the sod, a comely rank of fifteen bass and one pike-perch, Ruisseau proudly remarks, "I'ms guess dat ole wimmens ain't beat *me*, don't it?"

The sun is burning the low clouds and setting the western edge of the world on fire, and so, making a jail-delivery of our few remaining minnows, we turn backward on our long shadows and wend our way homeward.

ON A GLASS ROOF

WINTER fishing in Northern latitudes is not the perfection of the sport of angling. It lacks many of the things which contribute to make that a fine art and a delightful pastime. The fine tackle of the fly-fisher and the skill to handle it properly, the long-contested and exciting fight between man and fish, are not for him who goes fishing in winter. Neither for him is the balmy air that wafts the odor of blossoms and voices of song-birds and babble of free streams, nor verdant sward, nor leafy woods, nor glint of sunlit waters. In fact, it savors somewhat of the pot; for it is often more the object to get fish than sport. But any fishing is better than no fishing; and when we remember that our fishing-days are growing fewer as the path behind us grows longer, it behooves us to make the most of those that are left us. Furthermore, it may be said in favor of this fishing that in one respect it excels all others — that is, in the proportion which the pleasure of getting ready for it bears to the actual sport. Though there are no flies to be artistically tied, nor fine rods to be inspected, nor reels to be oiled, the simple tackle must be overhauled and made ready in its way, and proper hooks and lines provided. If one is to try for pickerel

through the ice, he must make his "jacks," or "tilt-ups," and have them so nicely balanced that they will give no sign of the struggles of the live bait, yet rise at the first touch of "Long Face's" jaws. Over all these preparations one will have a good time with himself and his thoughts, whether or not he, at last, gets any result from his pleasant labors. One must have the provident forethought to dig his worms in the fall and store them in his cellar if he intends to go perch-fishing in winter, and to catch his minnows while the brooks are open, and keep and feed them in a water-trough or spring-hole till the winter day that he takes them pickerel-fishing. One needs not to go far for the bait for smelt and herring, for the pork-barrel furnishes that till the first fish of each kind is caught, when an eye or undercut of the tail of the smelt and a bit of the chin of the herring are used to lure their brethren to the upper world, where death and the frying-pan await them.

I do not know how many times I had promised to take myself a-fishing the next winter and had made some preparation toward fulfilling the promise. More than once I had dug a quart of worms in the latest pleasant, unfrozen days of fall, and put them in a big box of earth in the cellar; but among all the short days of many a long winter the day wherein to go fishing had never come, and in spring the worms, their destiny unfulfilled, were

set free, to bore to the core of the world if they chose. I had once laid in a stock of minnows, caught with mutual pains, of which the only good I got in winter was in watching and feeding them, and by June, when I might have used them for bass-bait, such friendly relations had grown up between us that I could not find it in my heart to treat them so cruelly, and so turned them out in the nearest stream for Nature to deal with as she would — let them grow to the utmost of minnowhood, or feed them to her big fish, or let them be twitched out by the pin-hooks of her boys. It was a tough tender-heartedness, I confess — like turning adrift a kitten one dislikes to kill.

So winter after winter had come and melted away, adding nothing to my experience, but a little to my knowledge of winter fishing, got verbally from old fishermen, and, with that, strength to my determination that I would some time go. At last the day came, a March day, with a promise of spring in the soft sky that endomed the winter landscape, when I found myself fairly started, well outfitted with an ice-slick for cutting holes, worms for perch, fat pork for smelt and herring, and tackle for all three.

The air was sharp and frosty, though the sun had got a good hour above the Green Mountains, — white enough now, — and there was a firm crust that would bear, which makes the best of

walking, as a crust that will not bear makes the worst. On such good footing, with all my outfit pocketable but the ice-slick, and that almost as good shoulder-ballast as a gun, I got on so speedily that I was soon on the "Crik," a broad and level roadway to the lake. At the last turn of this I found a couple of men fishing for pickerel, and stopped for a little chat with them and to see what sport they were having. Our conversation was mostly carried on at long range, fired back and forth across the ice — for they had a line of holes cut two rods or so apart for fifty rods along the channel, and the jack set at the farthest hole was as likely as any to point skyward and start them racing to it. Then I, at the farthest upstream hole, would watch them as they reached the jack, snatched it up, and quickly overhauled the line, pulling out sometimes a pickerel, sometimes a naked hook which the pickerel had got the better of and robbed of its minnow. They would shout back the tidings of their luck if good, or roll it back in a growl if bad, and then come leisurely toward me till another jack arose to beckon them more swiftly forward.

As I stooped to examine the fashion of a jack, the tip of it flew up and nearly bumped my nose, resenting which I laid hold of it and caught a three-pound pickerel, or rather the hook caught him, and I only pulled him out onto the drier side of the

ice, for the hook and line and jack and the tortured minnow do most of the fishing. The angler only baits the hooks and sets them to fishing, while he watches them and pulls out their catch.

These jacks are two slender pieces of wood, about fifteen inches long, turning on each other on a pivot at the middle. When in use the ends of the under piece rest upon the ice on either side of the hole. The upper stick, now at right angles with the under, has its heavier end also resting on the ice, while the lighter end holds the ten- or fifteen-foot line, a slight pull on which raises the butt of the upper stick and signals the alert fisherman to it.

Wishing my short-time friends good luck, I left them racing with their fish and went my way. Theirs could not be called a high order of sport, but it is good fun wherewith to stir the dullness of winter, for one cannot help getting excited in the game if the fish are biting freely and three or four jacks are up at once. It is better than toasting one's shins at the fire on such a day as this.

Presently I was out upon the broad bay of the lake which the old French explorers named the "Bay of the Vessels," whether for their own craft, the birch boats of the Indians, or the vessels of pottery found here, many fragments of which the lake even now tosses ashore or exhumes from the banks. If in either way it would give me one perfect suc-

cotash-pot just as it came from the hand of the Waubanakee squaw that fashioned it, or with the smutch of camp-fire smoke upon it, I should prize it above all the old china in the world. But I was born too late for such a gift, and get only shards.

As I skirted the rugged, silent shore, walking where last summer I boated, there were traces enough of the fierce fight that had raged before the cold subdued the lake and got it safe under hatches. All the nearest rocks and trees were mantled with ice, the spray of the last waves hurled ashore by the north wind, and twenty rods lakeward was a line of broken cakes, frozen into a jagged barricade, where the open water made its last stand. All's quiet now along Petowbowk, and King Frost reigns supreme and majestic. But the captive begins to groan as the sun, his deliverer, climbs upward and northward. Two months hence he will be playing tyrant in his turn, buffeting craft, water-fowl, and shores.

Beyond the first grim headland that clasps the bay, I saw some steadfast, upright specks, which I took to be fishermen, and, having faith that they knew better than I where to fish, made my way toward them. Coming nearer, some of the specks proved to be men, while other bigger ones turned out to be young evergreen trees set in the ice — better than the men, likely enough, if they had been left growing, but now only brush-heaps to

break the wind off the smaller specks. An ignoble use, I thought, to put a lusty young tree to for so short a time, presently to go drifting about the lake, doing no good to even so much as the eye of man. How much it might have done if the axe had spared it for a hundred years! Oh, these cursed hackers and hewers of trees! Will they never stay their hands from destroying the beauty and goodness of the earth?

Every hole already had its man, if not its bush, and I had to cut one for myself: so, slipping the thong of the slick over my wrist, I began chiseling, like a woodpecker mortising a tree for his grub, only I was boring haphazard, while his feathered ear or horny nose leads him straight to his prey. I cannot hear a fish swim, nor smell one till he is above water or in the frying-pan. But as a grub might be anywhere in the wood, so might a fish be anywhere in the water. I began to wonder how many bushels of crystals one must hew to come to the water of Petowbowk at this season; but at last I struck through to it, and it came to meet me faster than I wished, before I got the bottom of the hole big enough to let through the biggest fish I intended to catch.

Then I put a worm on my hook and dropped it through the scuttle I had made in the glass roof of the house of the fishes, and invited them up to take a look at the sky which they had not seen for so

many weeks. Sunbeams, moonlight, and rays of stars had come to them but dimly and distorted in their recent quiet life; but they seemed satisfied with it, undisturbed by the tumult of winter storms and buffeting of waves, and had no desire to see anything of the world aboveboard.

For an hour I had such exciting sport as fishing in the well or cistern at home would have afforded, for not a bite did I get. It made it none the pleasanter to see my neighbors hauling out both perch and smelt, while my bait — tempting enough for the best of them, I thought — dangled untouched, if not unnoticed, by even the least minnow. I began to imagine my luckier or more skillful neighbors the fishermen laughing at me, if they were not too busy with their own affairs, and doubted not that my nearer neighbors of the nether world were on the broad grin, peering up at me.

“How many miles has he come just to show himself to us? And not much to look at at that, for he is not handsome, neither is he terrible, like the Canucks who are making such havoc among our friends over there. Does he look rather green? Or is it only that we see him through this emerald water?”

Some such whispers, I fancied, came from below. I made my line fast to a stick laid across the hole, and went visiting, for lack of something better to do, which is a winter custom in these parts.

I called first on the nearest fisherman, an ancient Canuck, so old, I thought, that, being of no use at home, his grown-up great-grandchildren had sent him fishing. Here he was valuable, for he had the gift of his race, and two or three dozen lusty perch were lying on the ice about him. He kept his short black pipe continually in blast when not re-charging it, smoking home-grown, greenish-black tobacco twisted into a half-inch rope which must have been endless, and so rank that I thought the friends of his youth in Canada might have their memories of him refreshed with a sniff of it, now that the south wind was blowing. As he knew as little English as I French, we had no very sociable intercourse, and it soon grew rather dull for both of us. So after a short tarry I moved on to the next hole, held by a younger Canadian. He had conquered the Queen's English, which if he did not murder outright he treated barbarously. He was also a conqueror of fish, and many of his victims lay about him, dead and dying, — perch in mail of iron and gold, smelt sheathed in silver, and herring in mother-of-pearl armor of all nacreous hues and tints.

“You don' ketch no feesh, ain't it?” he cried, with a grin. “Wal, da's too bad. Ah'm sorry, me.” I doubted his sorrowing much for this, for these Canucks think all the fish and all the berries belong to them.

“Hah! Dis pooty col’,” he said, beating his breast with his red hands. “’F Ah feesh here mauch, Ah have haouse. But prob’ly Ah won’t, prob’ly Ah will.”

He told me that wherever on the lake his brethren make a business of winter fishing it is done mostly in little board huts, which are moved out upon the ice when it has fairly made for the season, and hauled ashore before the spring break-up. In these little houses the fisherman spends his days and nights, for they are very comfortable, being banked with snow and furnished with a stove and bunk. A movable floor-board gives access to the fishing-hole beneath. This is the hatchway to a noble common cellar, reaching from Wood Creek to the Richelieu in length, and in width from Vermont to New York State, stored with plenty of food and drink of the wholesomest. It must be a cozy way of fishing, and, I thought, would suit me; for if, as it seemed, I was to get no fish, I might take my bad luck comfortably and shut out from prying eyes — keep it unknown to any but myself and the fish. My new acquaintance told me much of his affairs, of his luck in fishing at all seasons, of the money he had earned in haying and in chopping, and bragged of his wonderful horse:

“He worse more as *hundred* dollar. ’F you want heem go slow, he go *slow!* ’F you want heem go fas’, jus’ de same! Yas, *sir.*”

Of our withered neighbor he said: "He got too hole. W'en Ah got hole lak heem, Ah been dead great many year' 'go!"

He used the shortest rod I ever saw employed, it being only about a foot in length, with a slender cross-piece more than half as long, to wind up the line upon when not in use. When he had hooked a fish he tossed this aside and pulled it out hand over hand. He said that, besides perch, smelt, and bluefish, they occasionally caught a pike-perch, a little rock-pike, and "de mudder of de eel," as he called the ling and believed it to be. If this theory will help settle the vexed question of the generation of the eel, the scientists are welcome to it, if they will only give credit therefor to my friend Joseph Gerard, of Vermont, commonly known as Joe Gero.

The perch and smelt swim deep for the most part, and are usually fished for a little off the bottom. Worms are the best bait for perch; but after one smelt is caught his eyes are used to lure his fellows. It is said that these Champlain smelt do not visit salt water, though they might if they would; but they have the cucumber smell and taste of those taken in tide-waters. The salmon herring, lake herring, or whatever he is who here bears the name of "bluefish," is a recent comer to these waters; for, from all I can learn, he was unknown here till within ten or twelve years. No one

can deny that he is a very handsome fish, symmetrical in form, and, when first taken from the water, of beautiful mother-of-pearl hues; but as to his goodness opinions differ. The flesh is rather soft, and has its share of bones, but is of rich flavor. When he bites he comes close to the surface for the morsel of fat pork or bit of his brother's belly that is offered him, with a constant, gentle motion. When he is seen to take the bait, the angler strikes at once, or it is spit out. He is very shy, perhaps through being a stranger in strange waters, and will fly from the fisherman's shadow or sudden motion.

The ideal angler has quiet ways; and, observing that my third and last fellow-fisherman — if I had a right to claim such fellowship — kept to his post as steadfastly as an Esquimaux to a seal-hole, never wasting a motion, I was attracted to him. He proved to be a Waubanakee of Saint Francis, plying the gentle art here in the warpath of his ancestors. One fishing here two hundred years ago would have needed to keep at least one eye open for something more than fish, but both his little black ones were intent upon his line. From our low standpoint the rough, indented shore of Split Rock Mountain showed only as a straight ice-line, and it seemed as if a war party might slip by, unseen, behind the round of the world. Over there passed many a one, to and fro, in the old days

— Iroquois, Waubanakees, and whites; notable among them, with a bloody page in history, that of De Sainte-Hélène and De Mantet, French and Indians, creeping like panthers toward doomed Schenectady, then returning, gorged with blood and pillage.

This tamed great-grandson of those panthers looked peaceable and kindly enough, but was at first as taciturn as his ancestors could have been, and as slow to be drawn into conversation as the fish to the companionship which I desired of them; but, baiting with tobacco and lunch, I at last drew some talk from him. He told me that he and a few of his people were wintering in a neighboring village, making baskets and bows and arrows. They found but little sale for these, and, for want of something better to do, he had come a-fishing. Years before I had known some of his people, and through him I learned somewhat of my old acquaintances. One of them was Swasin Tahmont, who I doubt not was the Tahmunt Swasen of Thoreau's "Maine Woods." I was surprised to hear that he had gone to the happy hunting-grounds by the fire-water way, for when I knew him he would not touch whiskey and was very pious. He used to sing hymns to me in Waubanakee, and always said grace before his musquashmeat. Wadso, who many years ago had told me the Indian names of all these streams, had also

gone thither, but by a better path. His father still lives, the oldest man of his tribe. He commanded the Waubanakee warriors at the battle of Plattsburg. My new acquaintance had fleshed his war-arrows, having served in a New York regiment in the Civil War, and he looked as if he might have done good service. I wondered if then any of the old savagery had been awakened in him — if the war-whoop had risen to his lips when his regiment charged, or if he had been tempted to scalp a fallen foe. I heard of a Caughnawaga in one of our Vermont regiments who, when reproached for kicking a wounded rebel, justified himself by saying, “Me ’list, to kill um!” That was setting forth the truth with unpleasant plainness.

The ice was now whooping like a legion of Indians. Its wild, mysterious voice would first be heard faint and far away, then come rushing toward us swifter than the wind, with increasing volume of groans and yells, till it seemed as if the ice was about to yawn beneath us and devour us. The fish quit biting — as well they might, with a pother overhead enough to frighten a hungry saint from his meals. If I had been alone I should have fled to the shore; but, seeing my companion undisturbed by the uproar, I tried to feel at ease. When I asked him what made this noise, he simply answered, “The ice.” That was reason enough for him, and he evidently thought it should satisfy

me. I asked him if his people had any legend connected with it, and he answered, with a quiet laugh, "I've heard some stories 'bout it, but I guess they wa'n't very true."

After some coaxing, he told me this: "You know that big rock in the lake off north — Rock Dunder, you call it? Wal, our people use to call that Wojahose — that means 'the forbidded' — 'cause every time our people pass by it in their canoes, if they did n't throw some tobacco or corn or something to it, the big devil that live in it would n't let 'em go far without a big storm come, and maybe drowned 'em. He forbid 'em. Wal, bimeby they got sick of it — s'pose maybe they did n't always have much corn an' tobacco to throw 'way so — and the priests all pray their god to make Wojahose keep still an' not trouble 'em. After they prayed a long time, he promised 'em he'd keep Wojahose from hurtin' on 'em for a spell every year. So he froze the lake all over tight every winter for two or three months, and then our people could go off huntin' and fightin' all over the lake without payin' Wojahose. That made him mad, an' every little while he'd go roarin' round under the ice, tryin' to git out. But he could n't do much hurt, only once in a while git a man through a hole in the ice. That's the way I've heard some of our old men tell it; but I guess it's a story."

Wojahose has taken more to French customs of late years, and feeds now mostly upon horses. Not a winter passes that he does not swallow a score or so.

The south wind was blowing softly, and a veil of summer-like haze had fallen over the rugged steps of Split Rock Mountain. At its northern point, which gives it its name, the sleeping lighthouse loomed ghostly through it, awaiting the spring evening when it should again awaken and cast the glitter of its eye across the released waters. From behind this promontory suddenly flashed the sail of an ice-boat, swifter than a puff of wind-blown smoke, a phantom flying faster than feathered wings could bear it, and out of sight behind Thompson's Point almost as soon as we had seen it.

The mellow baying of a distant hound came to us, and presently we saw the fox creeping out from a headland, picking his way along the streaks of glare ice till he had got a half-mile from shore, when he put his best foot foremost and headed for the eastern border of the bay at full speed. When the hound came to the scentless ice he gave a long howl of disappointment, then circled and snuffed in vain, and at last went ashore, stopping now and then to cast a wistful glance behind him.

The day was on the wane, and home at the other end of a long walk. I pulled in and wound up my

guiltless line, dropping the untouched bait to the fish or Wojahose, and took the homeward way along the shore for a mile, and then up the Little River of Otters, for hundreds of years, as now, the road of men, fowl, and fish. From it the pickerel-fishers had departed, and the only tokens of their recent occupancy were the deserted holes, with here and there beside one a mangled minnow, a few pickerel-scales, half-burned matches, and the ashes of pipes. The deadness of winter brooded over the lonely icebound stream, and the only sound that broke the stillness besides the crunching of my footsteps was the storm-foreboding hoot of a great horned owl.

I had almost forgotten to say that I bore home a goodly string of fish, and, as no questions were asked, I got the credit of catching them. Indeed, after a few days, it almost seemed to me that I had caught them.

MERINO SHEEP

THE writer of a recently printed book concerning Americans of royal descent, and all such Americans as come near to being so graciously favored, has neglected to mention certain Americans who are descended from the pets of the proudest kings and nobles of the Old World. For there is such a family here — one so large that it greatly outnumbers all American descendants of European royal lines, excepting perhaps those of the Green Isle, almost as prolific of kings as of Democrats. They carry their finely clothed, blue-blooded bodies on four legs, for they are the famous American Merino sheep.

The Merino sheep originated in Spain, probably two thousand years ago, from a cross of African rams with the native ewes, and in course of time became established as a distinct breed, with such marked characteristics as to differentiate them from all other breeds in the world.

Different provinces had their different strains of Merinos, which were like strawberries in that, though all were good, some were better than others. There were also two great divisions — the Transhumantes or traveling flocks, and the Estantes or stationary flocks. The Transhumantes were

considered the best, as they had a right to be; for their owners were kings, nobles, and rich priests, and they had the pick of the fatness of the whole land, being pastured on the southern plains in winter, and in the spring and summer on the then fresher herbage of the mountains to the northward, from which they returned in the fall. For the accommodation of these four or five millions during their migrations, cultivators of the intervening land were obliged to leave a road, not less than ninety yards wide, as well as commons for the feeding of these flocks — a grievous burden to the husbandman, and for which there was little or no redress. A French writer says: “It was seldom that proprietors of land made demands when they sustained damage, thinking it better to suffer than to contest, when they were assured that the expense would greatly exceed any compensation they might recover.” A Spanish writer complains in a memoir addressed to his king, that “the corps of junadines (the proprietors of flocks) enjoy an enormous power, and have not only engrossed all the pastures of the kingdom, but have made cultivators abandon their most fertile lands; thus they have banished the estantes, ruined agriculture, and depopulated the country.” The Transhumantes were in flocks of ten thousand, cared for by fifty shepherds, each with a dog, and under the direction of a chief. Those who wish to learn more

of the management of these flocks and the life of their guardians are referred to the interesting essay on "Sheep," by Robert R. Livingston, printed by order of the Legislature of New York in 1810.

Of the traveling sheep were the strains known as Escurials, Guadalupes, Paulars, Infantados, Negrettis, and others, all esteemed for various qualities, and some of whose names have become familiar to American ears. The stationary flocks appear to have passed away, or at least to have gained no renown.

The Spanish sheep reached their highest excellence about the beginning of the nineteenth century; but during the Peninsular War the best flocks were destroyed or neglected, and the race so deteriorated that in 1851 a Vermont breeder of Merinos, who went to Spain on purpose to see the sheep of that country, wrote that he did not see a sheep there for which he would pay freight to America, and did not believe they had any of pure blood! But Merinos of pure blood had been brought into France in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and there carefully and judiciously bred. In Saxony they were carefully but injudiciously bred, everything being sacrificed to fineness of fleece.

Less than one hundred years ago the sheep of the United States were the descendants of the

English breeds, mixed and intermixed till they had lost the distinctive characteristics of their long-wooled, well-fleshed ancestors, and were known as "natives" (a name they were as much entitled to as their owners), being born here of parents who had not slept or grazed under other skies. For many generations having little care, their best shelter in winter being the stacks their poor fodder was tossed from, and their fare in summer the scant grass among the stumps of the clearings and the shaded herbage of the woods, by the survival of the fittest they came to be a hardy race, almost as wild as deer, and almost as well fitted to withstand the rigors of our climate and to elude capture by wild beasts or their rightful owners. Indeed, so much had they recovered the habits of their remotest ancestors, that to get up the settler's flock for washing or shearing, or the draft of a number for slaughter or sale, was at least a half-day's task, if not one uncertain of fulfillment. All the farmhands, and often the women and children of the household, were mustered for these herdings, and likely enough the neighbors had to be called in to help. The flocks were generally small, and the coarse, thin, short wool was mostly worked upon the now bygone hand-cards, spinning-wheels, and hand-looms for home use. As the clearings widened, the flocks of sheep grew larger, and wool-growing for market became an industry of some

importance. The character of the animals and the quality of their fleeces remained almost unchanged until the century was a half-score years old, when the Merinos had become established here, and the effect of their cross with the natives began to be manifest.

Perhaps mention should be made here of the Smith's Island sheep, of unknown origin, but peculiar to the island from which they took their name, which lies off the coast of Virginia, and belonged, about 1810, to Mr. Custis, Washington's stepson, who wrote a pamphlet concerning them, in which he says: "Their wool is a great deal longer than the Spanish, in quality vastly superior; the size and figure of the animal admit of no comparison, being highly in favor of the Smith's Island."

Livingston does not endorse these claims, but says of the wool: "It is soft, white, and silky, but neither so fine nor so soft as the Merino wool." If this breed is not extinct, it never gained much renown, nor noticeably spread beyond its island borders. I think Randall does not mention it in his "Practical Shepherd." There were also the Otter sheep, said to have originated on some island on our eastern coast, and whose distinguishing peculiarity was such extreme shortness of legs that Livingston says they could not run or jump, and they even walked with some difficulty. And there

were the Arlington sheep, derived from stock imported by Washington, the male a Persian ram, the mothers Bakewell ewes. They seem to have been a valuable breed of long-wooled sheep, but are now unknown.

The first importation of Merino sheep on record is that of William Foster, of Boston, who in 1793 brought over three from Spain and gave them to a friend, who had them killed for mutton, and, if the sheep were fat, I doubt not found it good, and wished there was more of it. In 1801 four ram lambs were sent to the United States by two French gentlemen. The only one that survived the passage was owned for several years in New York, and afterward founded some excellent grade flocks in Delaware. Randall says of him: "He was of fine form, weighed one hundred and thirty-eight pounds, and yielded eight and a half pounds of brook-washed wool, the heaviest fleece borne by any of the early imported Merinos of which I have seen any account."

What was then considered fine form would hardly take that place with our modern breeders, and the then remarkable weight of wool was not more than a quarter that of the fleece of many of the present Americans of the race; these last, however, not brook-washed nor even rain-washed. The next year Mr. Livingston, our Minister to France, sent home two pairs of Merinos from the Govern-

ment flock of Châlons, and afterward a ram from the Rambouillet flocks.

A table given by Livingston in 1810 is interesting in showing the effect of the first cross on the common or native sheep. The average weight of the fleeces of a flock of these was three pounds ten ounces; that of the half-bred Merino offspring, five pounds one ounce. Similar results came of the larger importation, in the same year, by Colonel Humphreys, our Minister to Spain, of twenty-one rams and seventy ewes, selected from the Infan-tado family. In 1809 and 1810 Mr. Jarvis, American Consul at Lisbon, bought nearly four thousand sheep of the confiscated flocks of Spanish nobles, all of which were shipped to different ports in the United States, and in those years, and the one following, from three thousand to five thousand Spanish Merinos were imported by other persons. In 1809 and 1810 half-blood Merino wool was sold for seventy-five cents and full blood for two dollars a pound, and during the War of 1812 the latter sold for two dollars and fifty cents a pound. Naturally, a Merino fever was engendered, and imported and American-born rams of the breed were sold for enormous prices, some of Livingston's ram lambs for one thousand dollars each. But such a sudden downfall followed the Peace of Ghent that, before the end of the year 1815, full-blooded sheep were sold for one dollar each.

Till 1824 the price of wool continued so low that, during the intervening years, nearly all the full-blood Merino flocks were broken up or carelessly bred. Then the enactment of a tariff favoring the production of fine wool revived the prostrate industry, and unfortunately brought about the introduction of the miserable Saxon Merinos, large numbers of which were now imported. In the breeding of these, everything having been sacrificed to fineness of wool, the result was a small, puny animal, bearing two, possibly three, pounds of very fine, short wool. Such was the craze for these unworthy favorites of the hour that almost all owners of Spanish sheep crossed them with the Saxon, to the serious injury of their flocks. They held the foremost place in America among fine-wooled sheep for fifteen or twenty years, and then went out of favor, and have now quite disappeared, I believe.

The Spanish Merino now came to the front again, and of them the descendants of the Jarvis and Humphreys importation were most highly esteemed. As has been mentioned, the flocks of Spain had sadly deteriorated, and the American sheep derived from them in their best days far surpassed them, if not their own progenitors.

Wool-growing became the leading industry of the Green Mountain State. Almost every Vermont farmer was a shepherd, and had his half-

hundred or hundreds or thousands of grade sheep or full bloods dotting the ferny pastures of the hill country or the broad levels of the Champlain Valley, rank with English grasses. From old Fort Dummer to the Canada line one could hardly get beyond the sound of the sheep's bleat unless he took to the great woods, and even there he was likely enough to hear the intermittent jingle of a sheep-bell chiming with the songs of the hermit and wood thrushes, or to meet a flock driven clattering over the pebbles of a mountain road; for a mid-wood settler had his little herd of sheep, to which he gave in summer the freedom of the woods, and which took — alas for the owner's crops — the freedom of the meadow and grain patches, and were sheltered from the chill of winter nights in a frame barn bigger than their master's log house.

In June, when the May-yearned lambs were skipping in the sunshine that had warmed the pools and streams till the bullfrogs had their voices in tune, the sheep were gathered from the pastures and driven over the dusty roads to the pens beside the pools on the tapped mill-flumes and washed amid a pother of rushing waters, shouts of laughter of men and boys, and discordant, plaintive bleats of parted ewes and lambs.

A fortnight or so later came the great event of the shepherd's year, the shearing, for which great

preparation was made within house and barn. The best the farm afforded must be provided for the furnishing of the table; for the shearers were not ordinary farm laborers, but mostly farmers and farmers' sons, and as well to do as their employer, who was likely enough to shear, in his turn, for them. Whoever possessed the skill of shearing a sheep thought it not beneath him to ply his well-paid handicraft in all the country round. For these the fatted calf was killed and the green peas and strawberries were picked. The barn floor and its overhanging scaffolds were carefully swept, the stables were littered with clean straw, the wool-bench was set up, and the reel full of twine was made ready in its place. Those were merry days in the old gray barns that were not too fine to have swallows' holes in their gables, moss on their shingles, and a fringe of hemp, mayweed, and smartweed about their jagged underpinning. There was jesting and the telling of merry tales from morning till night, and bursts of laughter that scared the swallows out of the cobwebbed roof-peak and the sitting hen from her nest in the left-over haymow. Neighbors called to get a taste of the fun and the cider, to see how the flock "evridged," and to engage hands for their own shearing. At nooning, after the grand dinner, while the older men napped on the floor, wool-bench, or scaffold, with their heads pillowed on

soft places, the young fellows had trials of strength at "pulling stick" or lifting "stiff legs." The skillful wool-tier was rarer than the skillful shearer, and in much demand in his own and neighboring townships. He tied the fleeces quickly and compactly, showing the best on the outside, but with no clod of dirty locks in the middle; for in those days wool had its place and dirt its place, but the fleece was not their common place. The catcher was a humble but not unimportant member of the force. He must be alert and with a sheep ready for each shearer as wanted, and was never to take up a sheep by the wool, but with his left arm underneath, just behind the fore legs, and his right hand grasping a hind leg. And there was the boy to pick up locks, discarding the dirty ones, which were swept outdoors. One's back aches as he remembers this unpleasant duty of his boyhood, when he was scoffed by shearers and scolded by the wool-tier, and often had the added labor of carrying the wool to its storage. Fourteen fleeces tied up in a blanket was the load, which, if they had been of nowadays weight, would have burdened a strong man; but a five-pound fleece was a heavy one then. I have never been present at one of the modern public shearings, which come before the swallows do, while winter is still skirmishing with spring, and are celebrated in the local papers; but I doubt if they

are such hearty and enjoyable seasons as the old-fashioned shearings were.

The wool-buyers scoured the country at or after shearing-time, and drove their bargains with the farmers. The small lots of wool were hauled in bulk to some central point of shipment, while the larger clips were sacked on the grower's premises. The sack was suspended through a hole of its own diameter in an upper floor and a few fleeces were thrown in, when the packer lowered himself into it and placed and trod the wool as it was passed to him till he had trod his way to the top. Then the sacks were lowered, sewed, weighed, marked, and went their way to market.

The "tag-locks" and pulled wool were mostly worked up in the neighboring small factories into stocking-yarn, flannel, and blankets for the farmer's use, and into the then somewhat famous "Vermont gray," which was the common cold-weather outer clothing of New England male farm-folk. Readers of Thoreau will remember that he mentions it more than once, and thought it good enough wear for him. The Yankee farmer wore it "to mill an' to meetin'," and the young men of forty years ago were not ashamed to appear in such sheep's clothing at the paring bee or the ball.

Vermont, become so famous as a wool-produc-

ing State that English cutlers stamped their best shears "True Vermonters," presently became more famous as the nursery of improvement of the Merino breed, to which object several intelligent breeders devoted their efforts. By selection of the best of the animals obtainable, the form of the sheep was made more robust, the size increased, and with it the length and thickness of all parts of the fleece, so that the wool on a sheep's belly was nearly as long as that on the sides.

French Merinos, so much changed, since the importations by Livingston, from the fashion of their Spanish ancestors that they had become a distinct family, were introduced, and had their admirers, as had the Silesian Merinos. These modern French sheep were larger and coarser than the original Spaniards; the Silesians, smaller than the French, but handsomer and hardier.

As naturally as in former times, a "Merino fever" again began to rage; fabulous prices were paid for sheep, and men mortgaged their farms to become possessors of a score of full bloods. There was no registry of flocks, and jockeys sold grade sheep, numbered, lampblackened, and oiled up to the desired blackness and greasiness, for full bloods at prices tenfold beyond their real worth. Growers ran to the opposite extreme from that to which they had gone during the Saxon craze, and now so sacrificed everything to weight of fleece that Ver-

mont wool fell into the evil repute of being filthy stuff, more grease and dirt than honest fiber. The tide ebbed again to lowest watermark; again the inheritors of the blue blood of the Paulars and Infantados went to the shambles at the prices paid for the meanest plebeian natives, and it seemed as if the sheep-farming of Vermont had got its death-blow.

Even so had the farming of sheep for wool; for in the great West a vast region had been opened wherein sheep could be kept at such a fraction of the cost entailed in winter-burdened New England that there was nothing for the Yankee wool-grower but to give up the losing fight. So most shepherds turned dairymen.

But, gifted with a wise foresight, a few owners of fine flocks kept them and bred them as carefully as ever, and in the fullness of time were richly rewarded. After a while it became evident that the flocks of the West could only be kept up to the desired standard by frequent infusions of the Eastern blood; and so it has come about that sheep-breeding in Vermont is a greater, stronger-founded, and more prosperous industry than ever before. Each year more and more buyers come from Texas, California, Colorado, and Australia; and on many an unpretending Vermont farm, after examination of points and pedigree, often more carefully kept than their owner's, the horn-coroneted dons of

the fold change masters at prices rivaling those of blood horses.

The care given these high-bred, fine-wooled sheep is a wonderful contrast to the little received by flocks in the times when wool-growing was the chief object of our sheep farmers; when, though sheep had good and abundant food, and fairly comfortable shelter from cold and storm, they had nothing more. The lambs were dropped in May after the ewes were turned out to grass, and were not looked after oftener than once a day in fine weather, and got only their mother's milk, if the ewe was a good milker and was fond enough of her ungainly yeanning to own it and give it such care as sheep give their young. Now the dons and doñas of blue blood have better quarters in winter than many a poor mortal, in barns so warm that water will not freeze in them, and are fed grain and roots as well as hay, and are sheltered from even soft summer rains, that their raiment may suffer no loss of color. The lambs are brought forth when spring has nothing in Vermont of that season but the name, and are fed with cow's milk, or put to nurse with coarse-wooled foster-mothers, more bountiful milkers than Merinos, and have a man to care for them night and day. The old-time rams tilted it out on the field of honor, to the sore bruising of heads and battering of helmets, and sometimes loss of life. But now rams of a warlike

turn are hooded like falcons, that they may do no harm to each other and their peaceable comrades. A blow might cost their owner a thousand dollars.

The successful sheep-breeder is up to his knees in clover, but the eastern wool-grower is on barren ground. A friend who lives in the heart of the Vermont sheep-breeding region writes me: "Ordinary rams sell for from ten dollars to twenty-five dollars a head; ordinary ewes for twenty dollars. The highest real price any one has known a ram to sell for within two years, eleven hundred dollars; the same for ewes, three hundred dollars. The wool of these sheep sells for twenty cents a pound. The wool itself does not pay for growing in the way in which these sheep are reared and cared for. The *wool* is a secondary object; the *bodies* are what they are bred for. . . . In the way sheep are kept on the large ranches southwest and west, the sheep so soon deteriorate that they are obliged to have thorough-bred rams to keep up their flocks. This is particularly the case in warm climates. Nature gets rid of the superfluous clothing as soon as possible."

It is interesting to compare the portraits of the best Merinos of eighty years ago with the improved American Merinos of the present day, and see what a change has been wrought in the race without change of blood. It is not unlikely that to the

uneducated eye the more natural and picturesque sheep of the old time would seem more comely than the bewrinkled, enfolded and aproned product of the many years of careful breeding. As a thing of beauty the modern Merino ram can hardly be called a success, but there are millions in this knight of the Golden Fleece.

A LITTLE BEAVER

WHEN you first see the beaver you are likely to feel that you already have some slight acquaintance with him, and then, searching your memory, you will probably find you have been thinking of the muskrat. Indeed, the animals have many points of resemblance, and except that the muskrat's tail is narrower, and longer in proportion, he is an excellent miniature portrait of his bigger and more valuable cousin, the beaver.

The hirsute face of the muskrat, grim with its small, deep-set eyes and grinning incisors, his long, brown, shining fur and soft under-coat of drab, his scaly shanks and webbed feet, his whole rounded clumsy form make a faithful reproduction in small of the larger animal. On land both have the same awkward, waddling gait; in the more congenial element both swim with the same rapid, even stroke, and dive with equal startling, lightning-like rapidity. The muskrat builds for a season's use a neat and comfortable house, but it provides no entrance, such as there is in the beaver's domicile, for the carrying in and out of food. The muskrat does not, like the beaver, lay up a store of winter food, but lives from paw to mouth. However, like the beaver's lodge, the muskrat's house

has a burrow in the bank, as a retreat for use in various emergencies.

Among these are the attacks of man and wild animals, and the rise of water. For the muskrat has not the sagacity in forecasting the seasons which many attribute to him. When he builds the walls of his house thin the winter is as likely as not to be unusually cold. If he builds his dome low and squat, the fall floods will probably drive him to his burrow in the bank; but still the second-hand prophets do not lose faith in him.

The muskrat is not a builder of dams, but rather a destroyer of them. He will avail himself of the ponds they create, but he has so little comprehension of their purpose that he will undermine them with his burrows. Then some fine afternoon he will awake to find the pond has run away, and left nothing in its place but a mud flat with a thin stream meandering through; and he will wonder at the cause of the disaster. After faring sumptuously for a few days on the stranded dying mussels, he will journey in quest of fresh under-water pastures.

As there are hermit beavers, so there are hermit muskrats, disappointed or misanthropic old fellows, who seek seclusion from their kind in some remote pool or small brook. Here the hermit lives in comparative safety from his worst enemy, man, gathering generous subsistence in summer from the sedges of the waterside and the green things of fields, the

corn bordering the brook, and the root-crop. But his solitary life does not exempt him from danger. When he makes nightly foraging incursions inland the prowling fox may catch his scent drifting on the breeze, and come stealthily up-wind upon him; or the great horned owl may swoop down out of the silence of the night.

At home the muskrat is not secure from his inveterate enemy, the mink, whose slender, snake-like body finds easy entrance into his burrow.

With winter come short commons, scant gleanings of water-plant roots on the bottom, and long overland tours of exploration, when perhaps a meal-barrel in a hog-house is discovered, or, by greater good fortune, secret entry to a cellar is made, and great store of succulent vegetables come at. But it is likelier that hunger and thirst necessitate a return to wider waters. The marsh-bordered streams, with their slow, smooth currents, their steady rise and fall of water, their broad meadows of innumerable aquatic plants and great beds of fat lily-roots, are the proper and appointed abiding-places of the muskrats. Here is abundant material for house-building, no current to interfere with the building, or to chafe and wear the house away; and here there is an inexhaustible supply of vegetable and animal food.

When the waning of summer is calendared by the bloom of goldenrod and aster on the upland,

and when cardinal-flowers and ripened water-maples kindle rival flames on the inner border of the marsh, the winter dwelling of the muskrat is builded unseen in the darkness. Night by night grows the dome of fresh green rushes, broad-leaved flags, angular-stalked sedges; and it is hardly noticeable among the green, rank standing plants until the thatch has grown dun with curing. Swift-winged teal alight there, and the great dusky ducks climb to the housetop for outlook over the marsh, but rarely except at night is the owner to be seen. He is both lake-dweller and cave-dweller, and between his two unlike habitations communication is had by a hidden path in the tangle of weeds, a pitfall for the unwary wader of the marsh. With the completion of the house, a new danger threatens the builders and their young family.

The mink and the owl have harassed the nightly labors and waylaid the lop-eared youngsters who made short excursions from the paternal roof; but now of a dew-silvered morning a knotted wisp of sedge or rushes or a patch of birch bark calls your attention to a "tally-stick," which secures a cruel trap. This has been set perhaps in the crumb-littered feed-bed outside the house, or even in the darkness of the inner chamber, to which the trapper has gained access by removing a bit of the wall, now neatly replaced.

Only spendthrift trappers follow this wasteful

practice, but they carry it on in fall and winter, especially in the latter season, when the ice facilitates travel over the marsh.

At these seasons men go quietly among the muskrat-houses, armed with one-tined spears, which they drive with such accuracy that they rarely fail to strike the inner chamber and almost always impale one victim, and oftener two.

The direst calamity that can befall the muskrat occurs when, at a low stage of water, extremely cold weather freezes the marsh to the bottom and cuts the animals off from the supply of aquatic roots. Whole families starve in the houses; a few dig their way to the outer world and wander far and wide over the snowy waste in quest of food, perhaps to find some meager fare, but more probably to perish by starvation or violence. In their eager quest for water, they sometimes gnaw through lead pipes, and so work a deal of mischief.

But there are always some who survive all the dangers that beset them, and see the beauty of spring again unfold upon the earth. Then the sunlit, open water invites them to freedom and bounteous fare, and their untenanted houses go adrift, in wrack and ruin, on the wide overflow of the spring flood. The scattered remnant of survivors coast along the low shores in quest of mates, whining a plaintive call as they ply their noiseless paddles. A traveler tells of hearing a cry which he mis-

took for that of a baby, but discovered to be the plaint of a tame beaver, which was being abused by some Indian children. So we may conclude that the muskrat and beaver have another point of resemblance in their voices.

Having found mates, as have the garrulous blackbirds in the trees above them, the ducks splashing into the water beside them, and the bitterns making nuptial rejoicing from drowsy sun-bathed coves, they begin to increase and multiply their kind. In a few favoring seasons the marshes are again populous with furry inhabitants, and the conical huts are thick along the border of the channel in autumn. It is wonderful how through all the years the muskrats maintain their numbers, for they are not sagacious or shy of man; indeed, they frequently establish themselves in close neighborhood to him, and make little attempt at concealment. They blunder carelessly into traps, and do not understand the danger signal of human scent.

A writer on natural history tells us, in illustration of these animals' sagacity, that in swimming from place to place to escape detection they will cover their heads with a green twig held in their mouths. As a matter of fact, however, this is simply their mode of carrying food to their burrows, and usually their burdens do not conceal their heads at all, but trail beside or behind them.

When alarmed, the muskrat dives quick as a flash, and swims far and well under water before breaking the surface for air; and this seems to be his only idea of escaping from danger.

The secret of the persistent holding out of the muskrat against the persecution of natural enemies and the relentless pursuit by man lies in its fecundity, its hardiness, its easy adaptation to changed conditions, and the abundance of food supplied by every stream in which water-plants grow and the fresh-water mussel lives. Long may the tribe endure to give a touch of wild life to our tamed streams.

TRAPPING UP LITTLE OTTER

MUCH talking of old times is one of the signs of old age, as common an accompaniment of it as gray hairs, toothless jaws, dimmed eyes, and stiffened joints, though a far pleasanter one. The weary mind clings more tenaciously to pleasant memories of youth than to fleeting, trivial incidents of yesterday. The old man longs to live them over again in story, and his tongue would fain be wagging. To that end he must have an audience. Young folks will serve if interested to hear of the days when the woods were populous with game, and the clear, shaded streams swarmed with fish that were not always lost. Better by far is some old comrade, a good listener, yet breaking in now and then with a reminder of some half-forgotten incident of the happy, care-free days. An old friend, an old pipe and an open fire — happy combination to bring out talk of old times.

“Do you remember the spring we went to Burton’s Pond?” a familiar voice asks out of the cloud of tobacco smoke. Yes, and how we were enticed there by the marvelous tales told of swarms of muskrats, told us by one without regard for truth, when we were looking about for trapping-grounds. We could trap up Little Otter as far as it would

float our boats, and then carry them over to the pond, make a camp there, and trap for a week, and then come home to enjoy our fortunes at leisure. Besides the money that was in it, there would be lots of fun, and so, having gained parental consent and parental aid in the shape of provisions — for, though grown-up, we were not of age — we three set forth on our expedition in two boats.

We embarked a little above the second falls, Joe and I in his boat, and By in his, paddling and poling at a leisurely rate, setting a trap at every likely sign, whether burrow, feed-bed, or nightly haunted log or tussock, and so on, as far as could be properly gone over next day. On the way up each boat kept its allotted side, never intruding on the other, but on the downstream course it was “go as you please,” as fast as current and paddle would bear us, with an eye out for a chance shot at a swimming rat. The trapping here, when water rose and fell several inches in the course of the day and night, was very different from that in the marshy lower creek, where there was little variation in the rise and fall of the sluggish current, and a trap remained nearly at the same depth at which it was set.

Next morning we voyaged upstream again, taking up traps and catch till we reached the end of yesterday’s voyage, where we began setting until we came to rapids so swift and rough that we had

all we could do to make headway. Then slack-water and "sign" for a few more traps up to the torn water of Dover Rapids, the busy scene of many manufactures in old times, all deserted now and silent but for the rush of the rapids and the roar of the cataract, no vestige left but a rusted shaft, a broken wheel, a grass-grown embankment — memorials of departed industries and dead hopes.

We lugged and dragged our boats and cargoes around the falls and launched them again in slack water, reaching in lazy loops to the site of the old Boston Iron Company's forges. A little below it we rounded a long bend half encircling the Old Indian Garden, where they say was an Indian cornfield. There was a more authentic memorial of times almost as old in the venerable tree, living and standing with a deep notch cut in it with the plain marks of a beaver's teeth. An old man, a son of the first settler at this place, told me that the last trout of Little Otter were caught here, and were plenty enough in his father's day, but I never found any one old enough to remember seeing a beaver. Hard by on the flats of Mud Creek was a great haunt of these animals, long ago trapped to extermination by Iroquois and Waubanakee and adventurous white fur-hunters. The levels were flooded by dams that can still be traced, and ditching the alluvial soil brings to light a pave-

ment of peeled sticks, the tooth-marks as distinct as when first made, but crumbling to pieces after brief exposure.

Here, where the old company's throbbing hammers incessantly shook the forest sixty years ago, a roaring rapid compelled another toilsome carry, happily the last awaiting us in these waters. Now it was easy navigating the slow current. The meadows on a level with our eyes were growing green in the pleasant April weather that touched us with the comfortable indolence of spring fever, as it seemed to touch the crow lazily hunting grubs on the broad intervale, and the blackbirds oozing a gurgle of melody and discord from the elms above us.

A woodchuck waddling along the bank prospecting for the earliest clover fools us into stalking him for a muskrat until he takes alarm and scurries into his burrow with a derisive whistle. We came head to head above the banks of a bend with a great blue heron that sprang to flight with a startled croak, and frightened a pair of dusky ducks, startling us in turn with sudden splash and flutter, and taking new fright at the sight of our boats. Doubtless the pair were in quest of a secluded summer home where they might rear their annual brood of ducklings in peace, and we hoped our brief intrusion might not change their plans, which gave promise of sport the coming fall.

When the well-named hillock, Hedgehog Hill, bristled far behind us, the creek narrowed to a channel that barely gave passage to our boats, and our voyage came to an end where a short bridge spanned it.

A team met us, and loading our boats on to the wagon went lumbering and bumping over the rough-dried clay highway toward our destination. Happily escaping shipwreck on this dried sea of mud, we came to a bright little torrent of cascades and rapids, which we rightly guessed to be the outlet of our pond, then saw the gable of a sawmill peeping over the top of the hill, and then came to its hospitable door, the whole open side gaping a welcome to customers and their logs. Even so long ago the old-fashioned "up-and-down" sawmill had been almost entirely superseded by the modern circular saw, and we lingered a little while to refresh our earliest recollections with watching the automatic movements of this relic of old times. It was as interesting to us, grown up, if not so wonderful to us, as when callow urchins, to see the keen saw gnawing its gradual way steadily through the log, tossing up jets of sawdust till the carriage tripped the gate lever, and the machinery creaked to a slow halt; then, in obedience to the push of a lever, the carriage trundled the log back to its first position, the leaping saw attacked it, and again gnawed through it. What a wonder it must

have been when it came to push aside the clumsy old pit saw and its two attendants, the name of one of whom, the pitman, was fitly appropriated by one of its parts!

We were not looking at the mill all this while without more than half an eye to the pond, nor without some disappointment. There it lay, clear and bright in the April sun, but sorely disfigured by the dead, drowned trees that stood around and knee-deep in it, and among which its upper end was lost, for it was an artificial pond, made by throwing a dam across a wooded dell, and so of course killing all the flooded trees. Some were evergreens and some deciduous, and all were ugly in dead nakedness. Beyond, we could hear the brook brawling its way down the mountain, a stream once populous with trout and not yet quite fishless, so a kingfisher proclaimed, mapping an aerial tracing of its course, with continuous clatter. Some bunches of driftweed lodged among tree trunks that might be débris of ruined muskrat houses, and a modest display of sign on a floating log gave evidence of the presence of muskrats. A clumsy scow with a broken trap and a tally stick lying in the bottom, grounded on the bank near the bulkhead of the flume, showed a rival at hand.

Pulling our boats into the water, we began exploring the pond, keeping an eye out for a good place for a camp. The shores were low and damp,

and we could not see anywhere from the water a place at all to our liking. We found promising places for a few traps, and having set them became aware that it was time to search in earnest for a night's lodging. The sawyer gave us a flat refusal when we asked for a chance to spread our buffalo skins on the kitchen floor. Evidently he did not look kindly upon our invasion of his domain, though we had been told that no one trapped here and the rats were going to waste, dying of old age. However, he afterward came to be on trading terms, furnishing us with some articles that we found ourselves in need of. Among them I remember some dip candles which were the most remarkable triumphs of the chandler's art we had ever seen. We called them self-supporting wicks, for it was a marvel how a limp, loosely twisted cotton cord could stand with such a thin casing of tallow. But they fitted our kind of sconce — a split stick — much better than larger ones would have done. We were making up our minds to be thankful for tramps' quarters if we could find a hospitable haymow; but just then we fell in with a cousin of By's, whose family lived in the neighborhood, and having heard of our presence there had sent him in search of us to invite us home. It was all right for By to accept the proffered hospitality of his relatives, but Joe and I were strangers, and it was rather awkward to crowd ourselves in. But

hunger and weariness overcame our scruples, and our hospitable entertainers soon made us forget we were strangers wearing mud-stained clothes. In the course of the evening chat around the kitchen stove we were told of a tenantless log house in the neighborhood of the pond that might serve our purpose as a camp if we could get the consent of its owner.

Accordingly, the next morning I was delegated to interview him. I found him at work in an adjacent field, a man with a pleasant face that promised a favorable answer, which was cheerfully given when he was assured that we had no evil designs on the community. The old house had one room, doorless and windowless, and without a fireplace, though there was a chimney built from the chamber floor with a pipe hole in the bottom for the accommodation of a stove. We set to work to make the most of this by building a primitive fireplace, consisting of a quantity of clay mud spread directly beneath the chimney and covered with flat stones embedded in it to bring them to an even surface. Upon this we could make enough fire to do a little very plain cooking, afford a little warmth and a great deal of smoke, some of which crawled up the chimney after the room was completely filled. During the smokiest progress of building the fire we lay prone upon the floor, breathing a little and weeping much until the worst was over and

we could crouch around our hearthstones to frizzle a slice of salt pork or warm ourselves.

We had the luck to find a two-inch plank on the premises, which we set edgewise in a corner at a proper distance from one wall, then filled the space with straw purchased of the sawyer, and spreading the buffalo skins on top we were furnished with a luxurious bed. The door being gone, we boarded up its place permanently, using the window hole for ingress and egress, tacking up some boards to keep out the weather when we were in for the night.

Our arrangements for beginning housekeeping being completed, we made the first round of our traps. The result was not encouraging; the water had risen with the shutting down of the mill gate, covering almost every trap so deep that they were untouched. We made allowance for this rise when resetting, and had better luck, but were at no time overburdened with skinning and stretching skins, for the place was not overstocked with rats, and we had convincing proof that toll was regularly taken out of our light catch. The navigation was a continual vexation by reason of stumps just under water, on which a boat would snag itself with a graceful ease that was the poetry of motion, and pivot thereon in exasperating response to our futile efforts to get her off with the bottom out of sounding by paddle or oar, and nothing within reach to push against.

When we got there, there was pleasant seclusion at the upper end of the pond, paled in by the ragged gray trees, where the shallow water was fretted by the ripples of the incoming brook, whose silvern babble came from the mountain dell along with the boisterous cackle of a log-cock. Some tiny minnows, which it pleased us to believe were trout, flashed to and fro across the golden-barred bottom, as the basking frogs cut short their lazy croaking and splashed into the water at our approach.

There was no resisting the spell of the indolent atmosphere that the April sun distilled, and stepping ashore we went back out of the desolation of drowned trees to living woods and loafed our fill on moss-cushioned logs. When the day and what we called its work were done, and the long shadows widened into twilight, we climbed in at our window, nailed up the boards behind us, illuminated our quarters with a couple of the sawyer's dips, "one to see the other by," Joe said, and lighted a fire on the hearth. After enduring a half-hour of smoky torment, we were rewarded with a bed of coals, over which we roasted some choice quarters of the most carefully dressed muskrats, or frizzled slices of salt pork, and if inclined to extreme luxury, toasted our brown bread. With sharp-set appetites and raw onions for sauce, we would not have exchanged our supper for the President's.

After it the pipes and quiet enjoyment of smoke

that was not torment, and a recapitulation of the day's fun and vexations, of which the first formed the greater part, and then yawning to bed and sound sleep — always but once.

A warm south wind blew a thick covering of clouds over the sky, that grew thicker and more lowering and portentous of a long rain storm. The threatening weather sent us to our quarters early, for our poor facilities for drying wet clothes made us dread a wetting. We were scarcely housed before the first drops fell in an intermittent pattering, quickly increasing to a wind-blown downpour that made us thankful for the sound roof over us. From end to end of the eaves a broad cataract fell and ran in a noisy, rushing brook to join another larger one in the highway ditch.

I could imagine the women of former households sallying forth on such occasions to put in order the always-delayed corner barrel to catch water for an infrequent washing, then scurrying in bedraggled and dripping, while the lazy men folk unconcernedly smoked by the greasy stove.

One could tell by the looks of the place, though so long uninhabited, that such was the class of its tenants. The marks of shiftlessness and discomfort were indelibly set upon it. Not even a stunted cherry tree nor sprawling unpruned currant bush grew near; no dry stalks of chance-sown poppy, pink or four-o'clock betokened the former

presence of a posy bed; and what was once by courtesy called a garden was a waste of dry weed stalks, pitted with scars of old potato hills.

As we peeped out across it through the crannies of the logs, we saw the columns of scud sweeping across the blank gray background from south to north, then change the direction of their march to the east until we heard the slanted drift of rain beating against the western gable. The air began to have a creeping chilliness upon which our smoky fire made as little impression as the glow of our pipes, and it grew more creepy and benumbing when the rain beat on the northern slant of the roof and then subsided to the slushy splash of wet snow. At last we were driven to the poverty-stricken extremity of going to bed to keep warm, when Joe declared that his back "felt as if he was list'nin' to a good scarey panther story when the critter's jest goin' to jump," and I am sure mine was as if the panther was in the chamber.

For awhile we dozed in a half-comfortable state, but the cold increased beyond the capacity of our buffaloes and straw to ward off, while the north wind shrieked with a keener blast after every lull. We spent the dreary night in turning over and over, giving one side a chance to thaw a little while the other slowly froze. We needed no alarm to get us up in the morning, but were up when the first level rays of the sun shining from a clear sky

came through the crevices of the logs. It shone upon a tranquil, frozen world. The windless woods and crisp, dun herbage, just sprinkled with snow of the storm's finale, glittered as if set with innumerable gems.

We crawled out into the sunlight and tried to absorb some of it, apparently with less success than a brave little song sparrow that sang his cheery lay from the top of a fence stake. We were not quite in the mood of singing, though we managed to crack some jokes over the night's misery, and counted it a part of the fun of our trip.

It was dismal work going the rounds of the traps, breaking ice to get to some, resetting in the icy water and getting little for our trouble, as the night's flood raised the water beyond our ordinary calculations.

A few days later the catch became so light that we decided to leave, and so engaging a team to transport our boats to the head of navigation, we bade farewell to our humble abode and Burton's Pond — a long farewell, for I never saw either again, and both have long since departed this world. We were probably the last tenants of the old house, which not long after went to the wood pile and the sawmill, and when the mill had devoured all the available woods in its neighborhood it was abandoned, the dam went to ruin and the pond ran away. Where it was a little brook crawls

among new alder thickets, and if a muskrat dwells there, it is only some solitary hermit who has wandered far from his fellows in search of a safer and quieter retreat.

I have heard of the place two or three times in connection with enormous blacksnakes which were seen there by people passing on the highway. A friend of mine killed one which measured eight feet in length. I do not know whether these snakes were the common water snake which is frequent in all our waters, though rarely so large, or the blacksnake common enough south of us, but almost unknown here. Fortunately for our peace of mind, Burton's Pond had not gained a snaky reputation at the time of our brief sojourn, in which case it might have been briefer.

Getting our boats afloat at the place of our previous debarkation, with nothing to detain us, we voyaged merrily down the narrow stream, now with newly turned-out kine staring at the strange apparition of bodiless human heads gliding past, now disturbing again our old acquaintances — the heron, the ducks and the woodchucks — and so after a little to the head of the long rapids above the old forge of the Boston Company. Joe and I ran our boat ashore without a thought of running the rapids, for though they were smooth enough at the head, white water showed below and there was an ominous roar that threatened danger. By

came dashing past, answering to our earnest remonstrances that "He'd risk it," and shot into the swift, smooth water like an arrow.

I watched him a moment, and then, as he seemed to be getting through safely, went about setting a mink trap in what looked to be a likely place in the base of a hollow tree. When not long so engaged, I was startled by a loud outcry of distress, "Rowlan'! Come quick! Come quick!" and tearing along the bank at the best pace my long legs would compass, I presently discovered our too adventurous comrade perched on top of a big boulder in the middle of the roaring current, holding aloft in one hand his dinner pail, in the other his precious bundle of furs, while just below lay his capsized boat, jammed fast against a rock, and gun, traps, and hatchet somewhere at the bottom. Joe arrived directly, and on finding that our friend was unhurt and no great harm done, we could not withhold a hearty laugh at the funny figure he cut with his carefully preserved treasures. We helped him ashore with them, and soon fished up the gun, traps, and other cargo, but our united efforts could not budge the boat an inch, nor could it be done until the creek had fallen considerably.

As there was no telling when a team would come for boats and traps, we insured the safety of the latter by caching them with a skill that would do no discredit to a Rocky Mountain trapper. We

removed a circular sod and excavated the earth to a sufficient depth, carrying away the loose dirt and throwing it in the creek, so that when the pit was done its precincts were as neat as a chipmunk's dooryard. Then the traps were closely packed in it, the sod adjusted in its original place so nicely that nothing but the searchlight of a thunderbolt could have revealed what was hidden there.

I once saw where a lightning stroke unearthed a log chain that had lain buried at the foot of a tree for unknown years, the electric current furrowing the turf and laying bare every contortion of the chain from end to end, just as it had been dropped from some careless hand.

Our traps were buried, our trapping ended, to little purpose save living very close to Nature and primitive life, sometimes almost to the verge of discomfort, though scarcely counted so by us. We fed on the coarsest fare with the zest of healthy appetites, slept soundly on the rudest beds, were sun-tanned and smoke-tanned to the color and odor of Indian-tanned buckskin, were unkempt and begrimed to the wonder and disgust of the good home folk who could not understand what we could find that was pleasant in such a life. We knew, if we could not tell them.

Good souls, they never thought of their ancestors living far harder lives but yesterday in the

world's age, only the hardiest surviving and preserving the vigor to perpetuate their race, nor did the good souls ever think the race would be none the worse now for a judicious infusion of old leaven of rough living. Some wisely do so; some foolishly play at it, because it is the fashion. I never could see what good or satisfaction there can be in camping out in an elegantly furnished house, where you are expected to dress for the luxuriously served dinner of several courses, and gossip, lawn tennis and golf are the chief recreations; or perchance a young lady catches a fish or fires a rifle in the direction of a target, she celebrates the unique event with a pretty squeal. There is nothing of the wholesomeness of true camp life in it all, none of its freedom from conventionalities, of the invention of makeshifts, no living close to the heart of nature.

Well, there are no more of the happy, care-free days of camping out for us three comrades — one sleeping his long sleep under the sumacs in the old burying ground; one other is a man of affairs, too busy to go camping; and the other bed-ridden, shut in from the bright and beautiful world by a wall of perpetual night. What wonder that he loves to babble of the days when the joy of beholding the beauty of the world was his. For him is only the inward sight to read the pages of memory whereon the record of things seen long ago is written in the story of youth.

THE BOY

I. TAKE THE BOY

It is a hopeful indication for the future of field sports that in several recent papers by sportsmen the boy accompanies the father in his recreations, to the pleasure and advantage of both.

The graybeard thrills with the delight of long-ago youth if his boy shows a quick eye and wit and a hand prompt to obey both. He is as pleased and proud as the youngster himself, if the son gets bird, beast, or fish skillfully and honorably. With this quick imitator by his side, he grows punctilious in observing every law laid down by man or by nature concerning the game he seeks, that he may teach by his practice a reverence for such laws and an obedience to them. The "pocket pistol," too, is left behind, if it ever before was thought an essential part of the refreshments.

From too great familiarity, or from the oppressing cares that added years often lay upon the elder (and that will not stay behind), if unaccompanied by this quick observer, he would pass unnoticed many objects of interest and beauty — here a wood duck preened her plumage and left a many-hued feather on the log for token; a water lily, late blooming, gleams under an overhanging water

maple; a hawk circles the far-off hilltop; or on a yellow birch a vireo has swung her birch-bark basket; a fox has left a chicken's bone or turkey's feather on the gray rock where he feasted the night before; a woodcock has twice bored the black mud by the wood road bridge.

To the boy such companionship brings numberless benefits. One of the best is the surprised feeling swelling his breast and beaming in his face of the comradeship implied.

He learns so pleasantly safe and legitimate methods of sportsmanship, that he will not forget to practice them in coming years. For him there will be no careless handling of the gun, no foolhardy feat attempted on the water, no fingerlings in his creel nor unlawful game in his bag.

He learns to love the woods, as by his father's side he steals silently over their sunny slopes to surprise a partridge; or as he stands by him, with finger on trigger and heart in throat, under birch or hemlock in October sunshine, listening to the nearing bugles of the hounds. So, in like manner, he loves the grass-bordered brook, from whose pools the trout leaps to his father's skillful cast, and the broader streams, where bass and salmon play. And mingled with this love of nature and her healthful recreations, there grows a stronger filial affection, not likely to grow less as the years increase.

II. THE BOY AND THE GUN

THE boy, bless his heart, is closer to Nature than the man. He is a savage in civilized attire; he steals and lies without a blush of shame, persecutes and domineers, and delights in noise and destruction, and will do and dare anything to satisfy his untamed cravings. To make an uproar and kill something nothing quite so well serves him as gunpowder, and for its employment nothing serves him so well as the gun.

Boys have grown particular of these later years, as have the grown-up savages on the frontier, and must have breech-loaders and "ca'tridges"; but when we graybeards were boys any tube of iron with a lock and stock was a prize. No matter how it missed fire, kicked or scattered, when it did go off you felt it as well as heard it, and it would sometimes kill a chipmunk or a robin, and so frighten a woodchuck that after one shotted salute from it he would keep his hole for half a day. What a big Injun was the boy who owned or had borrowed such a gun, and how all the other boys gathered about him to watch the mysterious process of loading. What a wise fellow was this to know that he must first put in the powder, and how much of it, and on top of it a wad of tow or wasp-nest or newspaper, and then the death-dealing pellets of precious shot poured out of a vial, and

then more wadding. Then came the grand final art of priming. It was thrilling to see him place a G.D. cap between his teeth while he covered the box and returned it to his pocket, then cock the piece and put the cap on the nipple. What if his thumb should slip from the striker as he eased it down! Sometimes it did, and then what a delightful scare if nothing worse; what shame for the unskillful engineer amid the jeers of the envious, gunless crowd.

But nowadays, alas, almost any boy may have a gun, and only he is enviable who has the best. Well, if he will only use his dangerous toy as he should, let him have it, for the sporting instinct is strong in the young savage. And who for pure love of it is such a naturalist? Is it not he who notes the first comers of spring, meets the chipmunk and the woodchuck at their thresholds when they first come forth from their winter sleep; finds the earliest birds' nests, and knows where the squirrels breed? The sportsman who enjoys his sport most is he who loves nature best; and who of all the guild enjoys his day with the gun with greater zest than the boy?

Yes, let the boy have his gun, a sound, well-made one, but teach him how to use it — carefully, temperately, humanely. Always as if it were loaded, never out of season, nor too often in season, and never for mere love of slaughter.

III. THE BOY AND THE ANGLE

NOT solely for the scientific angler with his eight-ounce rod, silken line, and flies cunningly fashioned to resemble no living thing, are all and the chiefest delights of the gentle pastime. There is one of humble estate in the brotherhood of the angle who makes no pretensions to skill, and uses the most uncouth and coarsest tackle, to whom it yields supremest enjoyment. He never cast a fly, and knows no "green drake" but him of the duck pond, no "doctor" but the village practitioner who gives him an occasional nauseous dose, no "professor" but the "destrict" schoolmaster, and if he ever heard of a split bamboo, thinks a split pole must be a poor stick to catch fish with. He wants no reel to wind in his fish with, but "yanks" them out and lands them high and dry and safe from return to the flood, casting them the length of pole and line behind him. This is, of course, our young and unsophisticated friend, the boy of the country, he who remains a boy till he has grown big enough to go a-fishing, and perhaps never becomes a young gentleman, but keeps a boy's heart within him, and a boy's ways until he becomes a man. He does not always wear a torn hat, nor always trousers in which he feels most at ease if sitting down when big girls are about, nor does he always go barefoot from spring till fall, though he

likes to give his naked soles a taste of the soil for a few days when he has seen the necessary seventeen butterflies.

Furthermore, we do not claim for him, nor does he for himself, that he can catch more fish than the scientific angler; but how he loves to go a-fishin', and how he enjoys it all, from the preparative beginning to the very end! What happiness is his in the cutting of the pole in the always-pleasant woods, where many a sapling is critically scanned and many a one laid low before the right and foreordained one is found; and in the buying of the ten-cent line and half dozen beautiful blue fish-hooks, selected with much deliberation from the tempting array in the showcase of the country store. How continually is he full of anticipation of sport from the moment he begins digging his bait; each big worm unearthed and going into the leaky coffee-pot promises a fish, and as he hurries across the fields to the stream he cannot stop even to look for a bird's nest, though sparrow, bobolink, and meadow lark start from almost at his feet. Nor hardly can he halt to disentangle his hook and line from the fence or bush they are seen to catch in, for he knows the fish are waiting for him. Then out of breath beside the stream he impales a lively worm, spits on it, not so much for luck as in deference to time-honored usage, gets his line straight out behind him, and sends it with a whiz and a re-

sounding "plung!" of the two-ounce sinker far out into the waters, and waits for a bite with what patience a boy can muster. Presently perhaps the expected thrill runs up his angle to his hands and through all his nerves, the tip of the pole nods, then bows low to the flood, and by no "turn of the wrist," but by main strength and by one and the same motion he hooks his victim and tears it from its watery hold. So swiftly has it made its curved flight over his head, unseen but as a dissolving streak, that he knows not till he has rushed to where it is kicking the grass whether his prize is a green-and-golden-barred perch, a gaudy-mottled pumpkin-seed, a silvery shiner or an ugly but toothsome bullpout, gritting his wide jaws when his horns do him no good, though they may yet do his captor a mischief.

Whatever it may be, he gloats over it as much as any man over his well-fought trout or bass, and straightway runs to cut a forked wand whereon to string it, and takes care that it be long enough to hold many another. If the fish do not bite he sets his pole in a crotched stick and lets it fish for itself while he explores the shore and catches a "mud turtle," "almost" kills a "mush rat" or scares himself with a big water snake.

Returning to his pole, perhaps he finds the tip under water and tugs out a writhing eel, the wild fun and horror, and the abominable, all-

pervading sliminess of whose final capture makes memorable the hour and the day thereof. Perhaps a hungry and not too fastidious pickerel or pike-perch or bass may gorge the worm-indued hook and be hauled ashore, and then the measure of the boy's glory is filled and the capacity of his trousers to contain him tried to the utmost.

Though he goes home with a beggarly account of small fry dangling at the end of his withe, he is unabashed, if not proud, and hopeful for another day. But if it is strung so full that his arms ache with lugging it, what pride fills his heart as he displays his fish! Till they are eaten and digested he ceases to be a "no-account boy." He cleans them and enjoys it. Every scale is a cent, bright from the mint, and he catches each fish over again as he takes it up. He recognizes his worms in their maws. When they are cooked, whoever tasted fish so good?

The boy is no more a contemplative angler than he is a gentle one, and he does not of choice go fishing alone. He would rather go with the renowned old fisherman of the neighborhood and learn something of the mysteries of his art, but that worthy does not overmuch desire the companionship of youthful anglers. So perforce the young fisherman goes with another boy and has some one to "holler" to, compare notes with, and enter into rivalry with, and he can say with

truth, when he gets home, "Me and Jim ketched twenty!" though he forgets to add that Jim caught nineteen of them. Wherefore not? Do not his biggers and betters brag of scores which would not have been made if their guides and oarsmen had not fished?

Alack, for the bygone days! When May comes with south winds and soft skies and the green fields are dotted with the gold of dandelions and patched with the blue of violets, and the bobolinks are riotous with song over them, who would not be a boy again just for one day to go a-fishing?

THE COUNTRY DOCTOR¹

OUT at all hours of day and night, pelted by storms of rain and storms of snow, chilled by bitter cold of winter and scorched by downright beams of the summer sun, our country doctor leads a hard and wearing life. He rides over roads now heavy with mire, now blocked with snow, now choking with dust. With body so overworked and mind perplexed by difficult cases and the worry of unreasoning and exacting patients, it is a wonder how he preserves health and strength without his own physic, or maintains a cheerful spirit, yet he does both.

In an obscure corner of his office you may discover a gun, a rod and a box of fishing tackle, none too carefully kept, yet all serviceable and ready for use in their season; and these constitute his private medicine chest, with judicious draughts wherefrom he preserves the health and vigor of body and mind.

Sometimes when you meet him on his way to visit a distant patient of the continually ailing sort, the gun shares with him the narrow seat of the sulky, unskillfully masked under a blanket, or the red case rests between his knees, and you guess his

¹ Dr. Willard of Vergennes.

intention of stealing an hour's shooting in some patch of roadside woods, or as much fishing in the stream that intersects his route. The entire days of such recreation that fall to his lot, lie far apart in the year.

It often happens when a day of freedom has apparently come, it slips away from him into the uncertainties of the future. Shells are loaded overnight, the gun cleaned and oiled, or the rod put in order, tackle overhauled, flies arranged or bait secured. He falls asleep with a prayer for an auspicious morrow, to dream pleasant dreams of frost-painted woodlands or waters rippled by the south wind's breath and shadowless beneath a clouded sky. The slow dawn brings an answer to his prayer, and his dreams seem about to materialize into tangible realities. His horse is at the door, his gun or rod in hand, his heart is light with the thought of throwing physic to the dogs for a day, when in rushes a messenger with an urgent call to some serious case.

In an instant the promised day of recreation is changed to one of wearing toil and anxiety. He meets the disappointment with a cheerful face and takes up the scarcely dropped burden of care without a murmur. Indeed he has grown so accustomed to such miscarriage of his plans that he is least disappointed when most so, and hope deferred does not make his stout heart sick.

He comes home weary and worn at night, but drops in at the shoemaker's and refreshes himself with a half hour's chat of reminiscent or prospective shooting or fishing. He finds the musty atmosphere of the cobbler's den congenial, and his visits are so frequent that the neighbors have ceased to ask him if the shoemaker is ailing. The mending of bodies and the mending of soles, notwithstanding their dissimilarity, seems to bring the practitioners of the two arts into an affinity which leads both to field sports and scientific pursuits more than any other professors and craftsmen.

When at last a day arrives that leaves the doctor free to practice the lighter arts of recreation, with what zest for them and entire abandonment of weightier duties he enters upon them. The faculties sharpened in his regular profession are keen in the pursuit of these, and sensitive to every touch of nature. He enjoys to the utmost her beauties, discovers her secrets, and acquaints himself with the lives of her children, the wood folk and water folk whom he loves, that have grown dearer through continual longing and rare opportunity.

Far apart in the years of his professional life he breaks the links of the lengthening chain, and escapes into the great woods beyond the recall by night-bell, messenger, or telegram. His comrades tell how he revels in his brief season of liberty,

when he is the life of the party, the ready deviser of expedients, the inventor of camp conveniences, the closest observer of nature, the keenest and yet the gentlest of sportsmen.

He is the better doctor for being a good sportsman, and his patients have no cause to blame him for deserting them, for he brings back to their service a clearer brain, firmer nerves, and a stronger body.

PORTRAITS IN INK

I. THE FARMER

A FARMER finds his best recreation in the woods and waters, with gun and rod, in the few respites that are given him from the toil whereby he conquers a livelihood from the soil.

There is a break in the dull round of labor when planting is done and hoeing time not yet come, when he goes a-fishing after his own fashion, and he deems the day the less ill spent if he bring home a catch that serves to break the monotonous fare of a farmer's table. Then there are days in haying when he follows the time-honored advice, "When it rains too hard to work, go a-fishing," for he cannot choose his days, only make the most of such as come to him. The day laborers that he hires have a freer choice than he, between work and pastime, and while he toils in the sun, he sees the gentleman angler and the market-fisherman plying their rods on his own stream, and hears the guns untimely thinning the broods of woodcock in his own alder copses.

Of a summer Sunday he strolls out to the wood-side pasture and watches a fox and her cubs at play about the threshold of their underground home, or if he fears the raid of some bounty-

hunter or vengeful poultry breeder, he gives the vixen an unmistakable hint to move to safer quarters. If her Thanksgiving antedates his by two months or more, he overlooks the mistake in the calendar and forgives the venal sin for the sake of future sport and possible expiation in the days of the sere and yellow leaf, days that shall bring more leisure to himself and freedom to the old hound, now yawning and whining in the leash at home.

When haying and harvesting are over, he robs less exacting labor of an occasional day to prowl along a willowy stream beloved of wood duck or to crawl in the sedgy borders of the haunts of dusky duck and teal, or he makes his stealthy way in the constant shade of wood roads and forest by-paths and ferny margins of the woods, where the yet unbroken flocks of grouse are likely to be, and if he stalks two or three wary birds and brings them to pocket from tree or ground, or from the air by rare chance, or gets one raking shot at a logful of sleeping wood ducks, or into a huddle of shy duskies, or a passing flock of swift-winged teal, he counts it a good day's sport, with tangible and sufficient proof thereof. But if he has none of the rewards, the fatigues of the day are rest from toil and care, and so not unrequited.

In the later days of the year, when woods are in the fading gray of autumn, or winter has overlaid

the russet with white, he ranges upland and lowland with hound and gun, hunting foxes, matching his knowledge against their cunning, and he is thankful to be the winner, but not cast down if he is the loser in the game. If he kills the fox, he thriftily saves the skin, and prizes it the more if it is prime and marketable.

He is friendly and generous to sportsmen who meet him in a like spirit, but not over-hospitable to such who only make a convenience of him, his home and hunting grounds. The first sportsman in the land does not observe close seasons more religiously than this jealous guardian of nesting and immature birds, of fox cubs and all young furbearers, yet he will not be converted to the belief that it is unsportsmanlike or unfair, in proper season, to shoot a fox before hounds, or stalk a sitting grouse, or catch a trout with a worm, all of which he does, not only without compunction but with absolute satisfaction.

He is a close and intelligent observer of nature, and freely imparts to congenial listeners what he learns of her secrets; but concerning his love of her he is as reticent as of the love of his sweetheart. For all expression in words, you would imagine that her infinitude of beauties are displayed in vain to him in all moods and seasons, yet his tell-tale face informs you how they satisfy his soul and fill his heart with unwritten, wordless poetry.

II. THE TRAPPER

BILL, the trapper, is a figure so out of place in the midst of the civilization that has swept away forests and game, that you almost wonder if he is not an Indian who happened to be born with a white skin, fair hair and blue eyes, or a pioneer hunter who drank at the fountain of youth in middle age and so has been preserved since the old wild days when the unmeasured wilderness stretched out into unknown lands and sheltered countless game. He has many of their traits, many of the qualifications that would fit him to live their lives amid their befitting surroundings; and is as out of place as they would be in this latter-day tameness of men and nature.

His tall, spare form, full of inert vigor and strength, clad in garments that befit his calling and that bear odorous witness of it, shacking leisurely among restless, busy men, on whose incessant bustle he casts wondering eyes alert through all their dreaminess, is as incongruous here as would be a becurled dandy in the heart of the wilderness.

He has that instinct, or sixth sense, possessed by few except Indians and dumb animals, which enables him to make his way to any desired point without any apparent guidance, though, save of dark night, he has little use for it in these narrow

and many pathed woodlands. He treads their rustling carpet as silently as a panther, the sere leaves do not stir, nor the dry twigs snap beneath his feet and the bent boughs sway to their places behind him without a sound. You are not aware of his coming till he appears before you like an apparition, nor of his going but as you watch him like one dissolving in the shadows of the woods.

His casual glances discover things which are not revealed to directed gaze, and he translates records that you cannot read. Where you see only a knot or wisp of brown leaves, he discovers the bird under the grouse's disguise of movelessness; on what is to you only a blank page, he reads the story of some remote or recent presence or passage.

He knows every kind of tree and its varieties, all the medicinal and poisonous plants by odd and homely names that often have a tang of folk lore or hint of forgotten use; and it is as instructive as a professor's discourse on natural history to hear him talk of the habits of wild things, for all his quaint superstitions concern some of them. You could find no arguments to shake his firm belief that eels are generated in mussels or that skunks have power to absorb their own spent effluence, nor do you care to.

He would not kill a nesting partridge or trap an unprime fur-bearer, yet he holds all legislative

protection of game and fish to be an infringement on his rights, and is as cunning as a fox in persistent violation of all such statutes. All wild things are his by natural inheritance, and what does a week or month matter, and whose affair is it if he desires fish, flesh, or fowl to-day?

He is somewhat conceited and boastful and envious of another's renown in his craft, to be foremost in which is his highest ambition. You confess it is a poor ambition to be most skillful in a trade that is obsolete and unrequited. With a slightly different bent, with one omitted trait, he would have had a higher aim and have been an Audubon or Thoreau, performing useful if ill-paid work, making a name honorably remembered.

As he is what he is, he slouches into old age and down to his last sod-roofed shanty, a shiftless, lazy, good-natured, disreputable old trapper, hunter and fisherman, and only by a few will he be kindly and briefly remembered.

Yet as you see him stealing through the second growth woods, tame and puny successors of the wild, majestic forests, or plying the noiseless paddle of his skiff in the nakedness of a shrunken stream, he is so like a lingering spirit of the old days that you are thankful for the picturesque figure which gives one touch of remote half-savage past to the commonplace present.

III. THE SHOEMAKER

THE old shoemaker, grizzled, unkempt, slovenly clad, warped with many years over last and lapstone, is a cheerful philosopher as he labors or meditates in his untidy shop.

There among the clutter of leather scraps, worn footgear and lasts, with the battered old gun in the corner beside the worn rod whose term of service is still extended by many bonds of waxed ends, you may sit at your ease or your peril on the rough little counter or on one of the half dozen rickety chairs, weak but hospitable even in the decrepitude of age. You will find genial companionship and get more useful information in an hour spent with this unassuming craftsman than in a day with more pretentious sportsmen.

It is not altogether greed for fish and game that entices him abroad in the few days wherein are conjoined an allurements of propitious weather and slackness of work. He admits with a laugh at himself, that he killed nothing in his last day's outing, but asserts that he had nevertheless a right good time. He got a fortnight's kinks out of his back and shoulders, a heartening smell of the woods, a feast of fresh air, and caught some of the wood folk at a new trick or uttering a heretofore unheard or unrecognized note, or he has seen some strange freak of nature. If you are interested, he

imparts to you his small discoveries, a poor but hospitable host sharing his meager fare with a hungry wayfarer.

You may find him just returned from a stolen half-day's excursion, rejoicing over a lucky shot, never claiming it to be more, and he relates with the particulars of circumstance and place, the finding of his grouse and how he brought it down, as it whirred and clattered almost unseen in the haze of brush. When you desire a sight of the finest bird he ever killed, he bashfully confesses that he left it at a sick neighbor's on his way home (a mile out of it though), but as he knew the sick man would not care he stuck one of the tail feathers in his hat, and this he displays with great satisfaction. He sticks it up on the wall beside the dried head of a big bass and the plummy tail of a gray squirrel, and you know by the far-away look in his eyes that it will need but a glance at these when the days of toil are long unbroken to conjure up the pleasant, restful loneliness of the woods, the glint of clear waters and the music of their voices.

He does not consort much with men in his outings, but of choice with boys, whom he delights to instruct in woodcraft and the mysteries of the gentle art. He baits the small boys' hooks with infinite care and unhooks the horned pouts and thorny-backed perch for them, untangles lines and recovers snagged hooks for them; he mends the

big boys, tackle, is uncle to them all and rejoices in their luck as if it were his own.

As you listen to his kindly and interested discourse concerning the wild world and its sports that he so unaffectedly loves, and look at the homely, genial face in setting of grizzled hair and beard, beaming with genuine enthusiasm, you realize that it needs something more than learned talk of high-bred dogs, fine guns and fancy tackle, or the possession of them, to make a true sportsman, for here is one in patched raiment and leather apron, who scarcely knows a pointer from a setter, nor ever owned a high-priced gun or rod, and yet is a true sportsman in the best sense of that abused title, for he is an ardent lover of honest sport, appreciating something in its achievements beyond skillful slaughter and the making of heavy scores. Is it not a privilege to have the confidence of this honest man and to associate with this simple and enthusiastic lover of nature?

IV. THE ANTICIPATOR

IF all sportsmen were like our harmless friend, game might live a quiet life and die of old age, while its human enemies were getting ready for a campaign against it.

Even though it makes you impatient, you cannot help being amused by the fuss of his constant preparation, nor fail to be warmed by his steady

enthusiasm that burns on and on like a slow-match, which never fires the mine of action.

What careful selection of guns, what labor of tinkering and cleaning them, what cautious purchasing of a new one and endless testing of its qualities, what thoughtful study of ammunition and close measurement of charges, what nice adjustment of all appurtenances go on while the season draws near, endures and is gone.

Then at once with unabated zeal he begins planning for the next, and refurnishing his equipments, targeting his guns, wearing them out with innocuous use. So his year passes in a round of pleasant anticipation and free of vain regret.

Once in its course, perhaps, he is betrayed into going shooting while yet unready. Your report of the abundance of squirrels, his favorite game, in your neighborhood, gets the prompt response of a promise to come in a day or two for a raid on them. During the week or a fortnight that await its fulfillment the woods are overrun by a horde of gunners, and every squirrel is killed or made alive to its own safety.

At last, late in the afternoon of the last day, your friend arrives with a wagon load of guns and equipments, whereof nine tenths are quite unnecessary. When he has made a studious selection from his embarrassment of riches, you go forth with him in the propitious last hour of sunlight.

You are so fortunate as to accomplish stealthy approach to a squirrel that, unconscious of danger, sits rasping a nut on a hickory branch, and as a courteous host should, you signal your guest to take the easy shot.

Slowly unlimbering his gun from under his arm, while he calculates the distance, he cautiously raises the weapon to its deadly aim. You hold your breath in expectancy breathless; but if you held it till he fired, you would have no further use for it.

A busy spider runs out to the steadfast muzzle and cables it to the ground with a silver thread. The squirrel turns his nut, half eaten, to begin on the other side, and suddenly becomes aware of enemies. Down drops the nut with raspings of shuck and shell, and up goes the squirrel behind the sheltering trunk, then out upon the further branches, and so goes plunging and scampering through upper byways in swift retreat to the heart of the woods.

Without lowering his gun, the dilatory marksman turns an almost triumphant face toward you, as who should say, "If he had not moved his fate was sealed."

He never risks a shot at running or flying game. You would as soon think of an oyster snatching its prey as of him shooting on the wing. If his game will not wait, it may go unscathed.

When the delayed opportunity arrives, he is as little exalted by success as cast down by failure, and calmly accepts good fortune with quiet thankfulness.

Whether he bears home a light or heavy bag, he seems never to be weighted with the burden of disappointment nor to be troubled with jealousy, while you can but envy his constant pleasure of anticipation, his sure enjoyment of participation.

Happy old man, long may he potter in endless preparation, long continue his meandering in the woods, a rarely harmful foe to all their denizens.

V. A PROFESSOR OF FISHING

WHENEVER you may chance to visit his haunts, in almost all weathers and seasons, you are likely to meet the old fisherman, wearing dilapidated clothes and bearing unconventional equipments.

Robins are not yet mating, nor the plovers calling in the tawny grass lands, before he is stealing along the brimming trout brooks, or is discovered on the flood-invaded river bank, in sun and shower and flurry of sugar-snow, so silent and so seldom moving, that the uninterrupted purr of the frogs arises from the drift of dead water-weeds close beside him, and the turtles bask undisturbed on the nearest log, the muskrat swims beneath the steadfast slant of his pole, and the wild duck whistles past him in unerring flight.

He is alert for the first sharp-set trout and tempts the hungry perch and bullhead with the earliest worm. No flies are looped about his shapeless, battered hat, no fly-book in his pocket, for he scorns all such gimcracks as he does reel and jointed rod.

A pole that only nature has had a hand in making, save in trimming, is good enough for him, and so is an honest bait that in no wise deceives but in concealing a hook.

Only when it comes to trolling has he departed from the ancient usage of pork rind and red flannel and become a late convert to modern metallic lures.

All day long, with the stout line held in his teeth, he trails the fluttering spoon along marshy margins and rocky shores, impelling his craft with slow oars or dextrous paddle, lazily laborious, always expectant, never excited by good luck, nor ever cast down by bad.

He fishes solely for fish, never for sport. In spearing and netting suckers when they come up stream to spawn and in hauling his seine when the law allows it, he has as much sport as in angling. If the pickerel, perch, and smelt bite well, he apparently enjoys ice-fishing, with its cold and desolate environment, quite as much as casting his bait in open waters under softer skies.

He wastes no time on the fine arts of the craft,

but brings each fast-hooked fish to boat or grass with short shrift, whether it be plebeian pickerel, eel, and pout, or patrician trout and bass.

Despise him not in the day of small things, for out of the abundance of his store many a light creel has become heavy, and blank scores been made reputable, to the credit of rods and flies quite innocent of piscine blood. Also, it is well to remember that if he is somewhat greedy, there are those no less so, who profess to be truer anglers than he.

If he is touched by the fine and subtle influences of nature, if he rejoices in the gladness of the birds, the beauty of the flowers, the greenness of woods and fields, the babble of waters, the glory of dawn and sunset, he makes no sign. Yet he is a close observer of what concerns his business, wise in the manners and moods of fishes, and whoever studies nature in any of her ways must in some sort be her lover.

He has the quaintness and originality that flavor men who live much by themselves and think their own thoughts, and if you approach him without assumption of superiority, you will find him an entertaining and profitable companion.

SMALL SHOT

I. SOME POOR MEN'S RICHES

THERE are many who have inherited the hunting instinct and were born too late to find game enough in the region of their birth to make hunting worth while for the game that can be got by the most persistent seeking, and who have not inherited wealth, nor the faculty of acquiring it, so that they may go for a week, month, or year, to places where game is still abundant. Some of these sometimes wonder whether this inheritance, come down to them through a thousand generations from wild ancestors, is not under such conditions an entailed ill-fortune, a wholesome desire, given without the opportunity of satisfying it, a purse of gold that one must always carry but never spend.

Most assuredly it is an unprofitable dower if it leads one to too continual pursuit of what at best he can get but little of, mere game. But if it takes him to the woods and fields for that reasonable share of recreation which belongs of right to all, rather than to questionable pastimes among ill-assorted associates, then it is something to be thankful for. With a gun to excuse his day's outing he goes forth. His wits are sharpened to find the haunts of the infrequent woodcock or quail or

grouse, that should rightfully be in the swamp, or field, or copse that of old their tribes possessed. All these places he must search, and study how changed conditions have wrought changes in the habits of the few survivors. The wits of these, too, are sharpened. The woodcock does not wait till the dog's nose is almost above him before he springs up with a twittering whistle, but flushes wild, and alights afar off. The scant bevy of quail goes off out of gunshot in a gray flurry to the mazes of the woods. The ruffed grouse tarries not to cry "quit! quit!" nor strut along the dim aisles of his woodland sanctuary, but hurtles away unseen, almost out of ear shot. If by good luck one of these falls to the unaccustomed aim, if a woodcock tumbles in a shower of leaves to the ferny carpet of the swamp, if a quail drops to the earth out of a whiff of feathers, if a grouse slants from his arrowy flight and strikes with a fluttering thud upon the fallen leaves, or a woodduck, started from a willowy bend of the river, splashes back into it before the powder smoke has unveiled him, the heart is warmed with a thrill of the satisfaction of well-doing.

Without even this appeasing of the sportsman's gentle bloodthirst, there is more and better to be got of a day's wandering with the helping burden of a gun. The companionship of Nature, the eavesdropping and spying to catch her secrets, the studying of the ways of all the little wood people,

not worth, or inestimably more than worth, powder and shot. Who has ever heard the last word the jay has to tell him in her many voices? Who has tired of visiting with the chickadees, or of watching the nuthatches creeping headlong down the mossy tree trunks, or the squirrels' saucy tricks, or the ways of strange woods plants growing and blowing and seeding, and the odd freaks of trees' growths, and no end of things that he would never have heard or seen if it had not been for this wooden and iron excuse that he lugs about with him? Thanks be to its first inventor, in spite of all the woeful mischief it has wrought. How many happy days it has gone to the making of, from boyhood to old age, in the lives of those who love it. What a comfort is the ownership of a good gun, though one seldom shoots it. What a pleasure its owner has in those seasons when it cannot be otherwise used, in putting it in order for the days fondly looked forward to — days when the woods have put on their last and bravest attire of the year — days when they have cast it off and all the landscape is veiled in the gray haze of Indian summer, and days when all the fields and frozen waters are white with the first snows and the wild music of the hounds stirs the woods.

When these days have come and gone and winter winds are howling, who so much as he, born to the love of field sports with small opportunity of

enjoying them, delights to read by his cheerful fireside what others more fortunate have written of their outings, and to share with them in spirit the happy hours in camps by wild lakes, the tramps in primeval forests, and hunting tours in far-away lands that he may never see.

II. THE OLD GUN

IT is not to be denied that there is great satisfaction in being the owner of a fine new gun. The perfect result of the handicraft of a master of the art of gunmaking; a piece so nicely balanced that it will almost take the line of flight of the swiftest flying bird of its own mere motion; all its parts so neatly fitted that a spider's web inserted might cause a jam; its polished and gracefully turned stock, the chosen bit of many a goodly tree; the variegated barrels almost as beautiful to look upon in their regular irregularity as a golden and purple barred sunset sky, or the shimmer of a rippled lake. It is a delight to the eye to see, to the hand to hold, a satisfaction to the soul to feel that one is the possessor of such a weapon. And yet, like riches, and like love, it has its cares, anxieties, and jealousies. One dislikes to be caught in the rain with such a gun in its untarnished beauty, or to take it out under threatening skies, or to breast haphazard blackberry briars with it in hand; to leave it at night uncleaned, though the day's

tramp has been a weary one, and all one's muscles and bones cry out for rest. One's richer neighbor may have a costlier gun, hence a pang of unchristian envy, and the breaking of a holy commandment, all for a stock and a bit of iron.

Not these frets and worries and ungodly heart-burnings are felt by him whose only weaponly possession is an ancient muzzle-loader, the barrels whereof halfway from breech to muzzle are worn bare of their first and only browning, with stock battered, scratched, and bruised, locks rickety and inviting irrigation. The rains may fall upon it and brambles scratch it, and it be none the worse for looks or use. Its owner may hang it on its hooks at night, with barrels foul and dully blushing with a film of rust; and sup with slow comfort, and then betake himself to dreamless sleep, untroubled by thought of duty unperformed.

What happy memories are awakened by the sight and touch of the old gun, with which one's first woodcock and snipe, wild duck and grouse were brought down. The very alder brake, and bog, river bend, and russet and green bit of beech and hemlock woodland rises before him, each the scene of a first glorious triumph in autumns long ago, and each in apparition almost as real as then, though all are changed or passed away. This bruise of the stock and dent in the barrel were got in a tumble over a ledge when you were rushing for a

runway, and you remember how your heart tumbled at the time, and it aches and burns yet with the fall it got, and the recollection of lost opportunity.

For use the old gun is as good as it was then — though its owner is not, and as for looks, he has none the better of it. Maybe there were those who used it before him, old hunters of the by-gone days when caplocks first came in and game was plenty; over whose tough old bones the grass has grown and withered, and the snow lain for many a year, and who are now remembered more by the guns they carried than by their gravestones. For the sights their now faded eyes beheld, for a chance at the game their guns brought down, what would one not give? The old gun is a link that holds one to the past. Let us not despise it, though it is of a fashion of other days — though it is rusted and battered and its maker's name worn off and forgotten, it has that in it more enduring than iron, that which no new gun can have, no matter how handsome or good.

III. THE SORROWS OF SPORTSMEN

EVEN so happy a man as he who disports himself with rod and gun has his sorrows, as has the less favored mortal whose pleasure lies in walks outside of quiet woods and afar from pleasant waters. Of the sportsman's vexations may be mentioned

many pertaining to things inanimate and animate. Of the first class are kinking lines, ill-working reels, non-exploding caps and primers, sticking shells, un-sticking wads, and no end of such perverse belongings to the angler's and gunner's outfit, as well as those which come in his way, as twigs, logs, bogs, cold water under foot and pouring from over head, to switch, tangle, trip, bemire, and soak him. Of animate things, how will all the insects of the air and earth combine to torture him, and how will the very objects of his pursuit forsake all the laws and rules laid down by nature and custom, and thwart his skillfulest endeavors to possess them.

But all these are nothing to the vexation and sorrow wrought unto his soul by his brother man. There are those counted honest in ordinary affairs of life who will poach in close times and rob their honestest fellows of that which enriches not them and makes these others poor indeed — in the loss of time and satisfaction of reasonable desires. And there are also law-makers who put pig's heads on their shoulders when they come to making laws for the protection of fish and game, though they bear the levellest of brains when matters of valuation and taxation are concerned.

Yet these are vexations of the spirit which one happy day of sport may lift, as north wind and sunshine the fog from the landscape. But when he, who has not been by his favorite stream since the

year-ago summer when birds and fields welcomed him with song and holiday attire, now finds the banks laid bare by the axe, and the stream turned away by some scientific agriculturist who hates willows and crooked waterways; when he, who has not visited copse and wood with dog and gun since last year's leaves were gaudy or sere, goes out to-day to find the alders he had come to think his own, only brush heaps and clusters of stubby stumps; his worshiped hemlocks and pines, his lithe birches and widespread beeches, and bee-inviting dog-woods, only saw logs and piles of cord wood lying in state among lopped branches and fluffy plumes of fire-weed, his heart grows sick with a climbing sorrow that will not down. How suddenly has his goodly heritage passed from him. A year ago he had more good of it than the one who held the deed of the land, though he got naught tangible therefrom but a half-filled creel or a few brace of birds. Yet how full was fed his starved spirit that so long had craved the blessed food that Nature gives to those who love her.

The worst of it is, that if he prays, or curses, or weeps, he cannot change it. By and by over this waste may be heard the "lovely laughter of the wind-swept wheat" and the hum of bees, which have come here to gather sweets from clover, but never again will brood over it the solemn quiet of the old woods, nor grouse cleave the shadows of

great trees, nor woodcock thrid the mazes of the brake, nor trout swim in the shade of the willows. This is the heaviest grief that comes to the man who uses rod and gun, or to him who hunts without a gun. Yet some good may come of it, for thereby he may learn to pity his red brother, who loved all these things and suffered greater loss in their passing from his possession.

IV. THE GOOSE-KILLERS

THE fable of the youth who killed the goose that laid every day a golden egg for him, has been told by tongue and print so often and for so many years that every one must have heard or read it, but it would seem that few had profited by it when year after year so many go on killing the geese that lay eggs of gold for them. It is no great matter of wonder that the thoughtless and purely selfish should do so foolish a thing, but it is almost past accounting for that those who are forecasting and prudent in the general affairs of life should be so blind to their interest.

When the wild geese come honking along the April sky, and wild ducks tarry a little on their journey in waters just unsealed, and snipe drop down on the thawing marshes to rest and feed, and flocks of shore birds skirt the long coast, all on their way to summer homes to lay eggs that would be golden in golden autumn, the goose-killer is in

wait for them all along their thoroughfare at every halting place, greedy for the most, craving the last of them. Then when he has wrought what havoc he can, though not the half he would, and the frightened survivors of the harried flocks of migrants have gone their way to the savage but kinder far North, he amuses his bloodthirst awhile with spawning bass and trout fry too small to wear a visible spot, and boasts shamelessly of the numbers he has caught.

Presently the woodcock is hatched and able to fly and so is the young grouse, and the half-grown plover is making short flights across the fields where it was born, and the goose-killer is in his glory now, for he can smell powder and taste warm blood again. It matters little to him what the husbanded chances of the future might bring. He counts a tough morsel to-day better than a tender feast to-morrow. A lean waterfowl in spring, an untimely taken fish, a half-grown woodcock, or grouse or plover in summer time are more to him than the dozen or score of each that might be hatched from the golden egg, and might be taken by and by in their proper season — by some one else, perhaps. Aye, there's the rub that brings upon the world the calamity of the goose-killer's existence and evil deeds. He must have what he will to-day, lest some one get more to-morrow, though there be nothing left for any one to-morrow.

If there were no hounding of deer, the world might come to an end before he could boast of killing one, he, meanwhile, eating his own heart with bitter sauce of envy, beholding the skillful hunter kill his stag often by fair and sportsman-like methods. What is it to him that there should be no deer in all the woods twenty years hence, so that he to-day clubs to death one suckling doe?

Nor is this so-called sportsman the only goose-killer whose wrongdoing makes us all suffer. For his and the milliners' profit and the barbarous ornamentation of women's head-dress, another ruthlessly slays the harmless and useful beautiful birds, to the world's loss of song and beauty and goodness. The farmer and the lumberman strip mountain and swamp of forest growth for a little present gain and the world's irreparable loss, the loss of copious springs and streams, and loss by disastrous floods. A few greedy speculators combine to spoil the nation's park for their own selfish gain, shameless, unscrupulous; and the nation looks on almost unconcerned, with but here and there a voice lifted in condemnation of the outrageous scheme of destruction.

So the ceaseless warfare against nature goes on, till one is almost ready to despair that the race of goose-killers shall be removed from the face of the earth till the last goose that lays an egg of

gold shall be killed; that the destroyer shall pass away only when there is nothing left for him to destroy.

V. WHY NOT WAIT?

WE have come to the frayed end of another winter. The earth's white carpet is worn to shreds, and Nature is making ready to weave her a new one of green, with all sorts of flower patterns that ought not to "fail to please the most fastidious." Some of the bluebirds have escaped the guns and snares of the milliners' collectors, and are with us again, the return of the robin has been announced, and the song sparrow is tuning up his pipe for the spring concerts. The crystal hatches will soon be off the streams, and the fishes will once more get a look at the sky, and at the angler, who is now beginning to overhaul his tackle in anticipation of the opening day of the season.

The ducks and geese and snipe and shore-birds will presently be on their way to northern breeding-grounds, and too many sportsmen are making ready to give them a most inhospitable greeting as they pass or tarry for a few days of rest. Too many sportsmen will be ready with the old and poor excuse for this wrongdoing, "If I do not shoot them, some one else will," which is worth nothing, for it is not at all certain that some one else will kill the bird that you spare, and that it will not go

safely to its breeding ground and return to pay tenfold interest in the fall for the lease of life you have given it. You would recoil with horror from the thought of killing a doe heavy with young, for you are an honorable and conscientious sportsman. And yet, all the females of these birds of passage are carrying eggs more or less developed, the hope of the abundant continuation of their species. And your example is worth something, as every man's is, yours perhaps worth far more than another's. If you did not get shooting in the spring, it is not unlikely that some one else would stay at home, simply because you did.

Another excuse and a no better one is, "If we do not shoot ducks and geese and snipe in spring, we shall have no shooting till summer woodcock shooting comes," which ought not to come at all. Why not wait till autumn for sport worth having, and concerning which one need have no qualms of conscience? Is not sport, like love, "the sweeter for the trial and delay?"

Let the gun rest for a few months longer, and then when the steel blue skies of autumn endome the bluer waters and the varied hues of frost-painted woods and russet marshes, you shall reap your reward if it is no more than the consciousness of having faithfully done your duty. It is sometimes nobler sportsmanship to spare than to kill. Assuredly it is so at this season.

NEW ENGLAND FENCES

A QUESTION of the future, that troubles the mind of the farmer more than almost any other is, What are we to do for fences? The wood-hungry iron horse is eating away the forests greedily and rapidly, and our people are ready to feed him to his fill for a paltry present fee, apparently learning no wisdom from the follies of our forest-destroying ancestors, but carrying on the same old, senseless, and indiscriminate warfare against trees wherever found, and seldom planting any except fruit-trees and a few shade-trees.

And, alas! no just retribution seems to overtake these evil-doers, except that most speculating deforesters go to the bad pecuniarily, but the curse descends on the sorrowing lovers of trees, and will fall on our children and our children's children, — the curse of a withered and wasted land, of hills made barren, of dried-up springs and shrunken streams.

It seems probable that a generation not far removed from this will see the last of the rail fences, those time-honored barriers of New England fields, too generous of timber to be kept up in a land barren of forests. The board fence will endure longer, but will pass away at last, and after it,

what? Where stone walls are, they may continue to be, and where there are stones enough there may be more stone walls, but all New England is not so bountifully supplied in this respect as parts of it that I have heard of, where if one buys an acre of land, he must buy another to pile the stones of the first acre on. In some of our alluvial lands it is hard to find stones enough for the corner supports of rail fences. The hedge, except for ornamentation in a small way, does not, somehow, seem to take kindly to us, or we to it; at least, I have never seen one of any great length, nor one flourishing much, that was intended to be a barrier against stock. If ever so thrifty for a while, is it not likely that the pestiferous field-mice, which are becoming plentier every year, as their enemies, the foxes, skunks, hawks, owls, and crows grow fewer, would destroy them in the first winter of deep snow? Great hopes were entertained of the wire fence at one time, but it has proved to be a delusion and indeed a snare. Some are temporizing with fate, or barely surrendering, by taking away the fences where grain fields or meadows border the highway. To me it is not pleasant to have the ancient boundaries of the road removed, over which kindly-spared trees have so long stood guard, and along whose sides black-raspberry bushes have sprung up and looped their inverted festoons of wine-colored stems and green leaves with silver linings,

bearing racemes of fruit that the sauntering school-boy lingers to gather. And far from pleasant is it to drive cattle or sheep along such unfenced ways, which they are certain to stray from, and exhaust the breath and patience of him who drives them and endeavors to keep them within the unmarked bounds; moreover, it gives the country a common look in more than one sense, as if nothing were worth keeping in or out. It will be a sad day for the advertiser of patent nostrums, when the road fence of broad, brush-inviting boards ceases to exist, and if we did not know that his evil genius would be certain to devise some blazoning of his balms, liniments, and bitters, quite as odious as this, we should be almost ready to say, away with this temptation. That was a happy device of one of our farmers, who turned the tables on the impudent advertiser, by knocking the boards off and then nailing them on again with the letters facing the field. The cattle stared a little at first at Ridgeway's Ready Restorative, but never took any.

However, it is not my purpose to speculate concerning the fences of the future, nor to devise means for impounding the fields of posterity, but rather to make some record of such fences as we now have, and some that have already passed away.

The old settlers, when they had brought a

patch of the earth face to face with the sun, and had sown their scanty seed therein, fenced it about with poles, a flimsy-looking barricade in the shadow of the lofty palisade of ancient trees that walled the "betterments," but sufficient to keep the few wood-ranging cattle out of the field whose green of springing grain was dotted and blotched with blackened stumps and log-heaps. The pole fence was laid after the same fashion of a rail fence, only the poles were longer than rail-cuts. There were also cross-staked pole fences, in which the fence was laid straight, each pole being upheld by two stakes crossing the one beneath, their lower ends being driven into the ground. This and the brush fence, though the earliest of our fences, have not yet passed away. That the last has not, one may find to his sorrow, when, coming to its length-wise-laid abatis in the woodland, he attempts to cross it. If he achieve it with a whole skin and unrent garments, he is a fortunate man, and if with an unruffled temper, he is certainly a good-natured one. According to an unwritten law, it is said that a lawful brush fence must be a rod wide, with no specification as to its height. You will think a less width enough, when you have made the passage of one. Coming to it, you are likely to start from its shelter a hare who has made his form there; or a ruffed grouse hurtles away from beside it, where she has been dusting her feathers in the powdery

remains of an old log; or you may catch glimpses of a brown wood wren silently exploring the maze of prostrate branches. These are the fence viewers of the woodlot.

To build or pile a brush fence, such small trees as stand along its line are lopped down, but not severed from the stump, and made to fall lengthwise of the fence; enough more trees are brought to it to give it the width and height required. Many of the lopped ones live and, their wounds healing, they grow to be vigorous trees, their fantastic forms marking the course of the old brush fence long after it has passed from the memory of man. I remember a noted one which stood by the roadside till an ambitious owner of a city lot bought it and had it removed to his urban patch, where it soon died. It was a lusty white oak, a foot or so in diameter at the ground, three feet above which the main trunk turned at a right angle and grew horizontally for about ten feet, and along this part were thrown up, at regular intervals, five perfect smaller trunks, each branching into a symmetrical head. It was the finest tree of such a strange growth that I ever saw, and if it had grown in a congenial human atmosphere, doubtless would have flourished for a hundred years or more, and likely enough, have become world-renowned. It was sold for five dollars! No wonder it died!

The log fence was a structure of more substance

than either the pole or the brush fence, but belonged to the same period of plentifulness, even cumbersomeness, of timber. The great logs, generally pine, were laid straight, overlapping a little at the ends, on which were placed horizontally the short cross-pieces, which upheld the logs next above. These fences were usually built three logs high and formed a very solid wooden wall, but at a lavish expense of material, for one of the logs sawn into boards would have fenced several times the length of the three. I remember but one, or rather the remains of one, for it was only a reddish and gray line of mouldering logs when I first knew it, with here and there a sturdy trunk still bravely holding out against decay, gray with the weather beating of fifty years, and adorned with a coral-like moss bearing scarlet spores.

From behind the log and brush fences, the prowling Indian ambushed the backwoodsman as he tilled his field, or reconnoitered the lonely cabin before he fell upon its defenseless inmates. Through or over these old-time fences, the bear pushed or clambered to his feast of "corn in the milk" or perhaps to his death, if he blundered against a harmless-looking bark string and pulled the trigger of a spring-gun, whose heavy charge of ball and buck-shot put an end to his predatory career.

After these early fences came the rail fence, as it is known in New England, or the snake fence,

as it is sometimes called from the slight resemblance of its zig-zag line to the course of a serpent, or the Virginia fence, perhaps because the Old Dominion was the mother of it as of presidents, but more likely for no better reason than that the common deer is named the Virginia deer, or that no end of quadrupeds and birds and plants, having their home as much in the United States as in the British Provinces, bear the title of *Canadensis*. But rail, snake, or Virginia, at any rate it is truly American, and probably has enclosed and does yet enclose more acres of our land than any other fence. But one seldom sees nowadays a new rail fence, or rather a fence of new rails, and we shall never have another wise and kindly railsplitter to rule over us; and no more new pine rails, shining like gold in the sun, and spicing the air with their terebinthine perfume. The noble pine has become too rare and valuable to be put to such base use. One may catch the white gleam of a new ash rail, or short-lived bass-wood, among the gray of the original fence, a patch of new stuff in the old garment, but not often the sheen of a whole fence of such freshly riven material. Some one has called the rail fence ugly or hideous. Truly, it must be confessed, the newly laid rail fence is not a thing of beauty, any more than is any other new thing that is fashioned by man and intended to stand out of doors. The most tastefully modeled house looks

out of place in the landscape till it has gained the perfect fellowship of its natural surroundings, has steeped itself in sunshine and storm, and become saturated with nature, is weather-stained, and has flecks of moss and lichen on its shingles and its underpinning, and can stand not altogether shame-faced in the presence of the old trees and world-old rocks and earth about it. So our fence must have settled to its place, its bottom rails have become almost one with the earth and all its others, its stakes and caps cemented together with mosses and enwrapped with vines, and so weather-beaten and crated with lichens that not a sliver can be taken from it and not be missed. Then is it beautiful, and looks as much a part of nature as the trees that shadow it, and the berry bushes and weeds that grow along it, and the stones that were pitched into its corners thirty years ago, to be gotten out of the way. Then the chipmunk takes the hollow rails for his house and stores his food therein, robins build their nests in the jutting corners and the wary crow is not afraid to light on it. What sheltering arms half enclose its angles, where storm-blown autumn leaves find their rest, and moulder to the dust of earth, covering the seeds of berries that the birds have dropped there — seeds which quicken and grow and border the fence with a thicket of berry bushes. Seeds of maples and birch and bass-wood, driven here by the winds of win-

ters long past, have lodged and sprouted, and have been kindly nursed till they have grown from tender shoots to storm-defying trees; there are clumps of sumacs also, with their fuzzy twigs and fern-like leaves and "bobs" of dusky crimson. Here violets bloom, and wind-flowers toss on their slender stems in the breath of May; and in summer the pink spikes of the willow herb overtop the upper rails, and the mass of the goldenrod's bloom lies like a drift of gold along the edge of the field.

The children who have not had a rail fence to play beside have been deprived of one abundant source of happiness, for every corner is a play-house, only needing a roof, which half a dozen bits of board will furnish, to complete it. Then they are so easy to climb and so pleasant to sit upon, when there is a flat top-rail; and when a bird's nest is found, it can be looked into so easily; and it is such jolly fun to chase a red squirrel and see him go tacking along the top rails; and there are such chances for berry-picking beside it. In winter, there are no snow-drifts so good to play on as those that form in regular waves along the rail fence, their crests running at right angles from the out-corners, their troughs from the inner ones. I am sorry for those children of the future who will have no rail fences to play about.

The board fence is quite as ugly as the rail

fence when new, perhaps more so, for it is more prim and more glaring, as there is no alternation of light and shade in its straight line. But age improves its appearance also, and when the kindly touch of nature has been laid upon it, and has slanted a post here and warped a board there, and given it her weather-mark, and sealed it with her broad seal of gray-green and black lichens, by which time weeds and bushes have grown in its shelter, it is very picturesque. Its prevailing gray has a multitude of shades; the varied weather-stains of the wood, the lichens, the shags of moss and their shadows, and some touches of more decided color, as the yellowish-green mould that gathers on some of the boards, the brown knots and rust-streaks from nail-heads, patches of green moss on the tops of posts, and here and there the half — or less — of a circle, chafed by a swaying weed or branch to the color of the unstained wood.

The woodpecker drills the decaying posts, and bluebird and wren make their nest in the hollow ones. There is often a ditch beside it, in which cowslips grow, and cat-tails and pussy-willows, akin only in name; on its edge horse-tails and wild grass, and higher up on the bank a tangle of hazel, wild mulberry, gooseberry and raspberry bushes, with a lesser undergrowth of ferns and poison ivy. The field and song sparrows hide their nests in its slope, and if the ditch is constantly and suffi-

ciently supplied with water, sometimes the muskrat burrows there, and you may see his clumsy tracks in the mud and the cleanly cut bits of the wild grass roots he has fed upon. Here, too, the hyla holds his earliest spring concerts.

All this applies only to the plain, unpretending fence, built simply for the division of fields, without any attempt at ornament. Nature has as slow and painful a labor to bring to her companionship the painted crib that encloses the skimpy dooryard of a staring, white, new — or modernized — farmhouse, as she has to subdue the glare of the house itself; but she will accomplish it in her own good time, — the sooner if aided by a little wholesome unthrift of an owner who allows his paint-brushes to dry in their pots.

The fence which is half wall and half board has a homely, rural look, as has the low wall topped with rails, resting on cross-stakes slanted athwart the wall, or the ends resting in rough mortises cut in posts that are built into the wall, which is as much of a "post and rail" fence as we often find in northern New England. A new fence of either kind is rarely seen nowadays in our part of the country, and both may be classed among those which are passing away.

Of all fences, the most enduring and the most satisfying to the eye is the stone wall. If its foundation is well laid, it may last as long as the

world — which, indeed, it may slowly sink into; or the accumulating layers of earth may in years cover it; but it will still be a wall — a grassy ridge with a core of stone. A wall soon gets rid of its new look. It is not propped up on the earth, but has its foundations in it; mosses and lichens take quickly and kindly to it, and grass and weeds grow out of its lower crevices, mullein and brakes and the bulby stalks of goldenrod spring up beside it. Black-raspberry bushes loop along it, over it, and stretch out from it, clumps of sweet elders shade its sides, and their broad cymes of blossoms, and later, clusters of blackberries, beloved of robins and school-boys, bend over it. When the stones of which it is built are gathered from the fields, as they generally are, they are of infinite variety, brought from the Far North by glaciers, washed up by the waves of ancient seas, and tumbled down to the lower lands from the overhanging ledges: lumps of gray granite and gneiss, and dull-red blocks of sandstone, fragments of blue limestone, and only a geologist knows how many others, mostly with smooth-worn sides and rounded corners and edges. All together, they make a line of beautifully variegated color and of light and shade. One old wall that I know of has been a rich mine for a brood of callow geologists, who have pecked it and overhauled it and looked and talked most wisely over its stones,

and called them names hard enough to break their stony hearts.

At the building of the wall, what bending and straining of stalwart backs and muscles; what shouting to oxen — for it would seem the ox can be driven only by sheer strength of lungs; what rude engineering to span the rivulet; what roaring of blasts, when stones were too large to be moved in whole, and the boys had the noise and smoke and excitement of a Fourth-of-July celebration without a penny's expense, but alas! with no gingerbread nor spruce beer. Then, too, what republics were convulsed when the great stones, underneath which a multitude of ants had founded their commonwealth, were pried up, and what hermits were disturbed when the newts were made to face the daylight, and earwigs and beetles forced to scurry away to new hiding-places! But when the wall was fairly built, the commonwealths and hermitages were reëstablished beneath it, more secure and undisturbed than ever.

The woodchuck takes the stone wall for his castle, and through its loopholes whistles defiance to the dogs who besiege him, but woe be to him if the boys join in the assault. They make a breach in his stronghold through which the dogs can reach him, or throw him a "slip-a-noose" into which he hooks his long teeth and is hauled forth to death. The weasel frequents a wall of this

kind, and there is hardly a fissure in its whole length through which his lithe, snake-like body cannot pass. You may now perhaps see his eyes peering out of a hole in the wall, so bright you might mistake them for dewdrops on a spider's web, or see him stealing to his lair with a field mouse in his mouth. In spring, summer, and fall, nature clothes this little hunter in russet, but in winter he has a furry coat almost as white as snow, with only a black tip to his tail by which to know himself in the wintry waste. The chipmunk, too, haunts the wall, and the red squirrel finds in it handy hiding-places into which to retreat, when from the topmost stone he has jeered and snickered at the passer-by beyond all patience.

Long after our people had begun to tire of mowing and ploughing about the great pine stumps, whose pitchy roots nothing but fire would destroy, and when the land had become too valuable to be cumbered by them, some timely genius arose and invented the stump puller and the stump fence. This fence withstands the tooth of time as long as the red-cedar posts, of which the boy said he knew they would last a hundred years, for his father had tried 'em lots of times; and now many fields of our old pine-bearing lands are bounded by these stumps, like barricades of mighty antlers. These old roots have a hold on the past, for in their day they have spread themselves in the un-

sunned mould of the primeval forest, whereon no man trod but the wild Abenaki, nor any tamed thing; have had in turn for their owners swarthy sagamores, sceptered kings and rude backwoods-men. Would they had life enough left in them to tell their story!

There is variety enough in the writhed and fantastic forms of the roots, but they are slow to don any covering of moss and lichens over their whity-gray, and so they have a bald, almost skeleton-like appearance. But when creeping plants — the woodbine, the wild grape, and the clematis — grow over the stump fence, it is very beautiful. The woodbine suits it best, and in summer converts it into a wall of dark green, in autumn into one of crimson, and in winter drapes it gracefully with its slender vines.

This fence has plenty of nooks for berry bushes, milk-weeds, goldenrods, and asters to grow in, which they speedily do and, as a return, help to hide its nakedness. Nor does it lack tenants, for the robin builds on it, and the bluebird makes its nest in its hollow prongs, as the wrens used to, before they so unaccountably deserted us. The chipmunk finds snug cells in the stumps, wood-chucks and skunks burrow beneath it, and it harbors multitudes of field mice.

In the neighborhood of sawmills, fencing a bit of the road and the sawyer's garden patch, but

seldom elsewhere, is seen a fence made of slabs from the mill, one end of each slab resting on the ground, the other upheld by cross stakes. It is not an enduring fence, and always looks too new to be as picturesque in color as it is in form. The common name of this fence is quite suggestive of the perils that threaten whoever tries to clamber over it, and he who has tried it once will skirt it a furlong rather than try it again. The sawyer's melons and apples would be safe enough inside it if there were no boys, — but what fence is boy-proof?

Of all fences, none is so simple as the water fence, only a pole spanning the stream, perhaps fastened at the larger end by a stout link and staple to a great water-maple, ash or buttonwood-tree, a mooring to hold it from going adrift when the floods sweep down. If the stream is shallow, it has a central support, a big stone that happens to be in the right place, or lacking this, a pier made like a great bench; if deep, the middle of the pole sags into the water and the upper current ripples over it. On it the turtle basks; here the wood-duck sits and sleeps or preens his handsome feathers in the sun, and the kingfisher watches for his fare of minnows, and the lithe mink and the clumsy muskrat rest upon it. Neighbor's cattle bathe in and sip the common stream, and lazily fight their common enemies, the fly and the mos-

quito, and for all we know compare the merits of their owners and respective pastures.

The fences of interval lands cannot be called water fences, although during spring and fall freshets they divide only wastes of water, across which they show merely as streaks of gray, or, as they are too apt to do, go drifting piecemeal down stream with the strong current. Then the owners go cruising over the flooded fields in quest of their rails and boards, finding some stranded on shores a long way from their proper place, some lodged in the lower branches and crotches of trees and in thickets of button-bushes, and some afloat, — losing many that go to the gain of some riparian freeholder further down the stream, but by the same chance getting perhaps as many as they lose.

I have seen a very peculiar fence in the slate region of Vermont, made of slabs of slate, set in the earth like a continuous row of closely planted headstones. It might give a nervous person a shudder, as if the stones were waiting for him to lie down in their lee for the final, inevitable sleep, with nothing left to be done but the stone-cutter to come and lie on the other side the fence.

The least of fences, excepting the toy fences that impound the make-believe herds of country children, are the little pickets of slivers that guard the melon and cucumber hills from the

claws of chanticleer and partlet. These are as certain signs of the sure establishment of spring as the cry of the upland plover. They maintain their post until early summer, when, if they have held their own against bugs, the vines have grown strong enough to take care of themselves and begin to wander, and the yellow blossoms meet the bumble-bee halfway.

The "line fence," of whatever material, may generally be known by the trees left growing along it, living landmarks, safer to be trusted than stones and dead wood, and showing that, as little as our people value trees, they have more faith in them than in each other. The burning and fall of the "corner hemlock," on which was carved in 1762 the numbers of four lots, brought dismay to four land-owners. The old corner has lost its mooring, and has drifted a rod or two away.

What heart-burnings and contentions have there not been concerning line fences, feuds lasting through generations, engendered by their divergence a few feet to the right or left, or by the question as to whom belonged the keeping up of this part or that! When the heads of some rural households were at pitchforks' points, a son and daughter were like enough to fall into the old way, namely, love, and Juliet Brown steals forth in the moonlight to meet Romeo Jones, and they bill and coo across the parents' bone of contention, in the

shadow of the guardian trees. If I were to write the story of their love, it should turn at length into smooth courses, and have no sorrowful ending—no departure of the lover, nor pining away of the lass, but at last their bridal bells should say:

“Life is sweeter, love is dearer,
For the trial and delay”;

and the two farms should become one, and nothing remain of the old fence but the trees where the lovers met, and under which their children and their children's children should play.

The ways through and over our fences are few and simple. The bar-way (in Yankeeland “a pair of bars”) seems to belong to the stone wall, rail and stump fences; though the balanced gate, with its long top bar pivoted on a post and loaded with a big stone at one end, the other dropping into a notch in the other post for a fastening, is often used to bar the roadways through them. The more pretending board fence has its more carefully made gate, swinging on iron hinges and fastened with a hook. Sometimes its posts are connected high overhead by a cross beam, — a “gallows gate,” — past which one would think the murderer must steal with terror as he skulks along in the gloaming.

The sound of letting down the bars is a familiar one to New England ears, and after the five or

six resonant wooden clangs, one listens to hear the cow-boy lift up his voice, or the farmer call his sheep. The rail fence is a stile all along its length, and so is a stone wall, though a stone or so is apt to tumble down if you clamber over it in an unaccustomed place. The footpath runs right over the rail fence, as easy to be seen in the polishing of the top rail as in the trodden sward. On some much-frequented ways "across lots" as to a spring, a slanted plank on either side the fence affords a comfortable passage, and down its pleasant incline a boy can no more walk than his marbles could. Let no one feel too proud to crawl through a stump fence, but be humbly thankful if he can find a hole that will give him passage. A bird can go over one very comfortably, and likewise over a brush fence, and this last nothing without wings can do; man and every beast larger than a squirrel must wade through it, unless they have the luck to come to a pole-barway in it.

A chapter might be written of fence breakers and leapers; of wickedly wise cows who unhook gates and toss off rails almost as handily as if they were human; of sheep who find holes that escape the eyes of their owners, and go through them with a flourish of trumpets like a victorious army that has breached the walls of a city; of horses who, in spite of pokes, take fences like trained steeple-chasers, and another chapter of fence walkers,

too, — for the rail fence and stone wall are convenient highways for the squirrel whereon to pass from nut-tree and cornfield to storehouse and home, and for puss to pick her dainty way, dry-footed, to and from her mousing and bird-poaching in the fields; the coon walks there, and Reynard makes them a link in the chain of his subtle devices.

One cannot help thinking of the possibility that, by and by, high farming may become universal, and soiling may become the common practice of farmers, and that then the building and keeping up of fences will end with the need of them, and the boundaries of farms be marked only by iron posts or stone pillars; then the old landmarks of gray fences, with their trees and shrubs and flowering weeds, will have passed away and no herds of kine or flocks of sheep dot the fields; and then, besides men and teams, there will be no living thing larger than a bird in the wide landscape. The prospect of such a time goes, with many other things, to reconcile one to the thought, that before that day his eyes will be closed in a sleep which such changed scenes will not trouble.

HUNTING THE HONEY-BEE

THE honey-bee came to America with civilization, — probably with the Pilgrims. Such industrious and thrifty little people, withal so warlike upon occasion, and sometimes without, were likely to find favor with the pious fathers, who themselves possessed and valued these traits. After getting some foothold in their new home, they would have had a hive or two of real English bees brought over in some small tub of a ship, tossed and buffeted across the wintry seas.

How the home feeling came back to the Puritan housewife when the little house of straw, built in England, was duly set on its bench, and in the first warm days of the early spring its inmates awoke to find themselves in a wild, strange land, and buzzed forth to experiment on the sap of the maple logs in the woodpile. How sweet to her homesick heart their familiar drowsy hum, and how sad the memories they awakened of the fields of daisies and violets and blooming hedgerows in the loved England never to be seen again.

There was rejoicing in the straw house when the willow catkins in the swamp and along the brooksides turned from silver to gold, and a happy bee must she have been who first found the ar-

butus in its hiding-place among the dead leaves, and the clusters of liverwort nodding above their purple-green leaves in the April wind, and the light drift of shad-blows that gleamed in the gray woods. Here were treasures worth forsaking even England to gather. Later she found the columbine, drooping over the ledge, heavy with sweets unattainable, and was fooled with the empty chalice of the bath-flower and with violets, blue as those of her own home, but scentless as spring-water.

Catching the spirit of their masters, some of the bees set their light sails and ventured far into the great, mysterious forest, and, founding colonies in hollow trees, began a life of independence. Their hoarded sweets became known to the bears and the Indians, no one knows how, or to which first. Perhaps the first swarm that flew wild hived itself inside a tree which was the winter home of a bear, who, climbing to his retreat when the first snows had powdered the green of the hemlocks and the russet floor of the woods, and backing down to his nest, found his way impeded by shelves of comb, filled with luscious sweetness the like of which no New England bear had ever before tasted — something to make his paws more savory sucking through the long months. Then the Indian, tracing him to his lair, secured a double prize — a fat bear, and something sweeter

than maple sap or sugar. There is a tradition that an Indian wizard was feasted on bread and honey, and strong water sweetened with honey, by the wife of a Puritan magistrate, to the great satisfaction of the inner red man. Learning whence the lucent syrup came, he told the bees such tales of the flowers of the forest, blooming from the sunny days of mid-April till into the depth of winter (for he bethought him that the sapless yellow blossoms of his own witch-hazel would in some sort bear out his word), that all the young swarms betook themselves to the wild woods and made their home therein. Another legend is that the wizard, in some way learning the secret of the bees, took on the semblance of their queen, and led a swarm into the woods, where he established it in a hollow tree, and so began the generation of wild bees.

However it came about, swarms of bees now and then lapsed into the primitive ways of life that their remote ancestors held, and have continued to do so down to these times, and will, when the freak takes them, utterly refuse to be charmed or terrified into abiding with their owners by any banging of pans or blowing of horns.

No one knows who our first bee-hunter was, whether black bear, red Indian, or white hunter, but the bear or the Indian was likeliest to become such. Bruin's keen nose was his guide to the prize,

the Indian's sharp eyes and woodcraft his, and the white man improved on the primitive ways by the invention of the bee-box and the science of cross-lining.

Bee-trees are sometimes found by accident, as when the bees, having been beguiled untimely forth by the warmth of the February or March sunbeams, are benumbed on exposure to the chill outer air and fall helpless and conspicuous on the snow at the tree's foot; or when in more genial days the in-going or out-coming of the busy inmates betrays their home to some hunter of larger game, or searcher for a particular kind or fashion of a timber tree. Well do I remember how Uncle Key,¹ veteran of our then last war, first master of our post-office, and most obliging of station-agents, discovered a great bee-tree on the side of the "New Road"² as it truly was then, and as it is and always will be called, I suppose, though its venerable projectors have long been laid to rest. Alert to profit by his discovery, Uncle Key called to his aid a couple of stout fellows, and with axes and vessels to hold a hundredweight or more of honey, he went to reap his reward. The tree was a monster; what an ocean of honey it might hold! There was no way in which it could be felled but right across the road, and there at last it lay,

¹ Uncle Key = Joshua Locke.

² New Road = Greenbush Road.

after much sweating of brows and lusty plying of axes — a barrier impassable to teams, athwart the commonwealth's highway, and nothing in it but a nest of yellow-jackets! Another who suffered a like disappointment and a cruel stinging to boot, when asked, by one aware of the facts, "if he had got much honey," answered, as he rubbed open his swollen eyelids: "No, we did n't git much honey, but we broke up their cussed haunt." There was a degree of consolation in this.

I do not like the bee-hunter as a bee-hunter, for he is a ruthless and lawless slayer of old trees. I cherish an abiding hatred of one who cut the last of the great buttonwoods on Sungahnee's bank. Think of his lopping down a tree whose broad leaves had dotted with shadow the passing canoes of Abenakis, in whose wide shade salmon swam and wild swans preened their snowy plumage in the old days, — and for a paltry pailful of honey! I hope the price of his ill-gotten spoils burned his fingers and his pocket, and was spent to no purpose; that the honey he ate turned to acid in his maw and vexed his interior with gripes and colic; and I wish the bleaching bones of the murdered tree might arise nightly and confront him as a fearful ghost. Its roots were not in my soil, but its lordly branches grew in the free air which is as much mine as any man's, and when they were laid low I was done a grievous and ir-

reparable wrong. A good and thoughtful man has such a tender feeling for trees and the rights of other men that he will think twice before he cuts even a sapling for his real need. I abhor those murdering fellows who think no more of taking the life of a tree a century or two old than they would of killing a man.

Nevertheless, I have good friends who are bee-hunters, chief among them one¹ who knows enough of Nature's secrets to make the reputation of two or three naturalists. The successful issue of a bee-hunt gives the toil a veritable sweetening, but I think my friend is successful even when unsuccessful, and that there is something sweeter to him in the quest than in the finding of a well-filled bee-tree.

Our bee-hunter chooses August and September for his labor, or pastime, whichever it may be called, and he can hardly find a pleasanter day for it than one of those which August sometimes brings us in its later weeks—days that give us a foretaste of September's best, but are fuller of blossoms than they will be, though there are not enough flowers in the woods to keep the wild bees busy there. The sky is of purest blue, and across it a few clear-edged clouds, fleeces of silver and pearl, slowly drift before a fresh northerly breeze, and their swifter shadows drift across the ripening

¹ Joe Birkett.

landscape — now darkening the green of meadow and pasture land, now the yellow of the stubble fields, and now flooding the light and shade of the woods with universal shadow. There is a wholesome coolness in the shade, and not too fervent warmth in the sunshine for one to bask comfortably therein if he will.

The bee-hunter is burdened with but few implements in his chase: first of all, a “bee-box,” six inches or so in length and a little less in width and height, with a hinged lid in which is set a small square of glass; midway between this and the bottom is a slide dividing the box into two compartments, the lower one holding a piece of honeycomb partly filled when in use with a thin syrup of white sugar and water. There is also an axe, or, perhaps, no larger cutting tool than a jack-knife; sometimes a compass, and, if he be of a feeding turn of stomach, a dinner-pail. So equipped, he takes the field, seeking his small quarry along wood-side meadow fences, whose stakes and top rails alone show above a flowery tangle of golden-rod, asters, and willow herb; in pastures that border the woods, dotted with these and thorny clumps of bull-thistles and the dark-green sedge and wild grass of the swales, overtopped by the dull white blossoms of boneset, pierced by clustered purple spikes of vervain, and here and there ablaze with the fire of the cardinal-flower.

Carefully looking over the flowers as he goes slowly along, among the bumble-bees and wasps that are gathering from them their slender stores of present food his quick eye discovers a honey-bee alight on the upright tassel of a thistle, or sucking a medicated sweet from the bitter flower of the boneset, or stealing the fairy's draught from the little tankard of the wild balsam, or working a placer of goldenrod, or exploring a constellation of asters; and stealthily slipping the open box under her, he claps the cover down, and has her a fast prisoner. Now he darkens her cell by covering the glass with his hand till she has buzzed away her wrath and astonishment and settles on the bit of comb which, before catching her, the hunter had placed on the slide. Seeing through the little skylight that she is making the best of the situation and is contentedly filling herself with the plentiful fare provided, he sets the box on a stump, boulder, or fence (if either be at hand — if not, he drives a triple-forked stake, or piles a few "chunks" for the purpose), and, opening the lid, sits or stands at a little distance, awaiting the outcoming of the bee.

This takes place in five minutes or so, when, having freighted herself, she takes wing and rises a few feet, circles rapidly till she has her bearings, and then sails swiftly homeward. What compass does she carry in her little head to guide her so

truly? The hunter takes no great pains to get her course this first trip. He places the comb on the closed lid of the box, replenishes its cells from a vial of syrup, lights his pipe, and disposes himself comfortably to watch the return of his sometime captive. The length of time he has to wait for this depends partly on the distance the bee has to go and partly on the wealth of her swarm, the members of a swarm with a scanty store of honey working faster than those of a rich one.

But soon or late she comes humming back, and, beating about a little, finds the lure and settles upon it, fills herself, rises, circles, and is away again. Now the hunter tries his best to catch her course, and it needs a quick and practiced eye to follow the brown speck as it gyrates wildly overhead for a moment and then darts away on the "bee-line," straight and swift as an arrow. Sometimes he gets rid of the uncomfortable twisting of the neck which such rapid eye-following requires when sitting or standing, by lying on his back near the box.

The bee has told her people of the easily gotten nectar, and, when next returning, brings a companion with her, and at each return perhaps another, till, maybe, a dozen are busy about the comb, and, as each flies homeward, the hunter strives to get its line of flight. Having this line pretty well established, if their journeys are evi-

dently short he follows it into the wood, and perhaps has the luck of finding the tree in a few minutes.

Our bee-hunter has no helpful bird, as the African bee-hunter has, to lead him by voice and flight to the hidden sweets, but must depend altogether on his own sharp eyes and skill. He takes little note of anything unconnected with his quest as he pushes through the brushwood and briers, and tramples the ferns under foot. The pack of half-grown grouse that go whirring away from his very feet may startle him with the suddenness of their uprising, but further than this he notices them as little as he does the jays that scold him or the squirrels that jeer at him, but holds right onward, his eye climbing every tree on the line that gives sign of hollow-heartedness, searching every foot of its length for the knot-hole, woodpecker's boring, or crevice which may be the gate of the bee's castle. Finding this, he takes formal possession by right of discovery, and hoists his flag on the walls, or, to be more exact, carves his initials on the bark.

If the bees are long in going and coming, he removes the comb to the bottom of the box, and, when some of the bees have settled on it, closes the lid. Then he jars the box till the bees rise to the top, when he shuts them off from the comb by closing the slide. This is to prevent them from

besmearing themselves with the syrup while being "moved up on the line," which is now to be done.

The hunter strikes into the woods at a smart pace, but carefully keeping his course and nursing his box tenderly under his arm. So going for twenty, thirty, forty, or more rods, but not too far, in some convenient little opening or clearing, if he comes to it, he "sets up" again and lets the bees on the comb, where they fill themselves and go and come as before. My bee-hunting friend tells me if the box has been unwittingly carried beyond their home, somehow the bees fail to find it again, as they do if it is set up very near the tree on the side it was approached. In the last case they probably overfly it, but both failures seem strange in such wise little folk.

"Cross-lining" is done by setting up at some little distance from the line already established, and getting a new one. Where this intersects the old, there, of course, the bee-tree is, but it is not the easiest thing in the world to find even then, for there may be a dozen trees about this not very well-defined point, each of which is likely enough, as looks go, to be the particular one.

A couple of our bee-hunters had looked long for a tree on their line when one of them, backing up against a great basswood to rest, was stung midway between his head and his heels, that part of his person happening to block the entrance, so

low that it had been overlooked, to what proved to be an eighty-pound bee-tree. My particular bee-hunter was puzzled by a swarm this season which he found at last in a fallen tree, and so was saved the labor of much chopping.

Like other mortals, the bee-hunter has his disappointments, as when the bees that he has lined through woods and across fields for a whole day, perhaps, or even longer, lead him at last to the sheltered hives of some farmhouse; or more than this, when, having found his tree and put his mark upon it, he goes at the first opportunity to cut it and finds that he has been forestalled by some freebooter, who has left him only the fallen tree, some fragments of empty comb, and the forlorn survivors of the harried swarm.

When the stronghold of the bees is sapped by the hunter's axe and topples down, in many cases the garrison appears to be so overwhelmed by the calamity as to offer little or no resistance; but often the doughty little amazons fight so bravely for home and honey, that their assailants are obliged to smother them with a "smudge" of dead leaves or straw before they can secure their booty.

The honey of the woods, though apt to be somewhat dirty, from the manner in which it is obtained, is thought by many to be better than the honey of the hives. I never knew one who loved the woods much that did not find wild meat more

toothsome than tame; and such may easily believe that this honey holds something of the aroma of the wild flowers from which it is so largely gathered and has caught a woody flavor from its wild surroundings.

THE VOICES OF THE SEASONS

ONE threatened with the loss of sight very naturally begins to reckon how far his other senses may be depended upon to acquaint him of what may be going on about him. If he is a lover of nature, a close or only an ordinary observer of it, he will be assured, as he recalls its voices, that if he were deprived of all senses but that of hearing, this one sense would inform him of the presence of each season if it did not apprise him of its coming.

The caw of returning crows, the swelling rush of unbound brooks, the nightly, monotonous, rasping note of the Acadian owl, would tell him certainly of the coming of spring. He would know by the crackling croak of the frogs, the hyla's shrill chime, the diffusive ringing of the toads, by the beat and roll of the ruffed grouse's muffled drum, and by the querulous whistle of the woodchuck warmed to new vitality, that the soft breath of spring was filling the earth with life, that the squirrel cups were blossoming in sunny woodside nooks, buds of arbutus beginning to blush under their rusty leaves on southern slopes of woodland ledges, and willow catkins were yellowing the swamps.

In sweetest fashion of all, the birds would tell the story. Indeed, if he had ever noted their com-

ing, he might now almost name the day of the month when he heard the twitter of the first swallow, the flicker's heartening cackle, the jingle of the bobolink's song, the swell and fall of the plover's wail.

The wind would stir the new leaves to tell him they were out, and the patter of the rain upon them would strengthen their testimony with a sound unmistakably different from its leaden pelt-ing of naked boughs and dead fields. The busy hum of bees overhead would tell of the blossoming of fruit trees, when the pendulous flowers of the locust were sweetest, and when, in July, the tiny bells of the basswood knolled perfume to call all the bees to the woods.

He would know when summer burned hottest by that very voice of heat, the shrill cry of the cicada, and by the troubled notes of parent birds, anxiously watching the first adventures of their chirping young in a world rimmed by a wider horizon than the brink of the nest, and at night-fall, by the crickets, creaking in full chorus with earnest, tireless monotony.

A little later would be heard the click of ripe apples through the leaves and their rebounding thuds upon the ground; at dusk, the screech owl shivering out his gruesome cry in the old orchard as if he "for all his feathers was a-cold" with the chill of the first autumnal evenings; and from

lonely woods would come the similarly quavering but more guttural, wilder and more lonesome call of the raccoon.

The absence of the earlier migrants would as noticeably mark the season as the hail and farewell of others passing southward in the nighttime; the startled chuckle of the plover, with hardly a hint in it of his springtime wail; the scaipe of the snipe; the woodcock's whistle; the bittern's squawk, voicing all his ungainliness; the quick, sibilant beat of wild ducks' wings; and the note of many a winged traveler whose identity can only be guessed at. One may know when October days have come by the gentle alighting of falling leaves, the incessant nut-rasping of the squirrels, the busy stir and low, absorbed notes of the jays in the beeches, the irregular patter of dropping mast, the chipmunk's clucking good-bye to the outer world, and an occasional clamor suddenly uprising from a great army of crows on its winged retreat to more hospitable climes.

Too soon one hears the scurry of wind-blown leaves along the earth and the clash of naked branches, the purr of the first snow falling on frozen grass and dry leaves and its light beat on roof and pane. The latest migrating wild geese announce their passage with a musical confusion of clarion notes, and jays, hairy and downy woodpeckers, nuthatches and chickadees come from

the woods and abide near the habitations of men, each with well-known note making one aware of his presence. With the snow come great flocks of snow buntings, late familiars of the Esquimau and Lap, the white bear and the reindeer, and all the animate and inanimate savagery of the frozen north. Their creaking twitter reminds one of the creak and tinkle of moving ice, their voice a voice of winter, unmistakable though faint.

There are winter days, or hours in winter days, when one's ears might make him believe that night was brooding over the earth, so hushed are all the voices of nature in a silence deeper than pervades even any night of spring, summer, or fall, for the silence of such a night will now and then be broken by insect, reptile, or nocturnal bird, or nightly prowling beast, or be emphasized by the low murmur of a distant stream. But now, not a bird note nor stir of withered leaf, nor smothered plaint of ice-bound brook, no sound of anything, animate or inanimate, disturbs the deathlike quietude which as unequivocally if not as imperiously, as his voices, proclaim the absolute sovereignty of winter. The sullen roar of the winds in leafless woods, the hiss of driving snow, the crack and shiver of ice may be heard in early spring and late fall, but this dead stillness is a sole prerogative of the stern king's reign.

When an unseasonable rain falls on the snow,

freezing as it falls, there is presently a hollow rattle of drops on the new-made crust, and every ice-sheathed branch and twig creaks and tinkles in the wind till the trees drop showers of gems that you can almost hear the glitter of. Sometimes when one sets foot on such a crust it seems as if the whole surface of a great field sank slightly, with a sudden resentful crash at the crunch of the first footfall. One's first impression is that he has sprung some immense natural trap, and he holds his breath for an instant in dazed expectation of catastrophe. Another characteristic sound of winter is the settling of "shell ice," when after a great thaw and flood, followed by sudden cold weather, the new ice falls to the level of the subsiding waters. It drops with startling suddenness, but with a prolonged musical ring very different from the short, flat crack of snow crust, while splinters of the broken edges slide down the sloped border and far across the lowered level, jingling and clinking as they glide like scattered handfuls of silver coin.

In the neighborhood of great frozen lakes is often heard one of the wildest sounds of winter and the most unearthly, the booming of the ice, caused by its cracking or by its contracting and expanding, or, as some maintain, by air beneath it. At first a thin, tortured cry arises, faint and far away, growing louder in swift approach, rising at times

almost to a yell, and mingled with hollow groans, now suddenly ceasing for an instant, now as suddenly bursting forth, then falling and dying away in such a wail as it began, far off in the direction opposite to that from whence it arose. It is as if tormented spirits were fleeing through the air, fleeter than the wind, as invisible, with voices as pervasive.

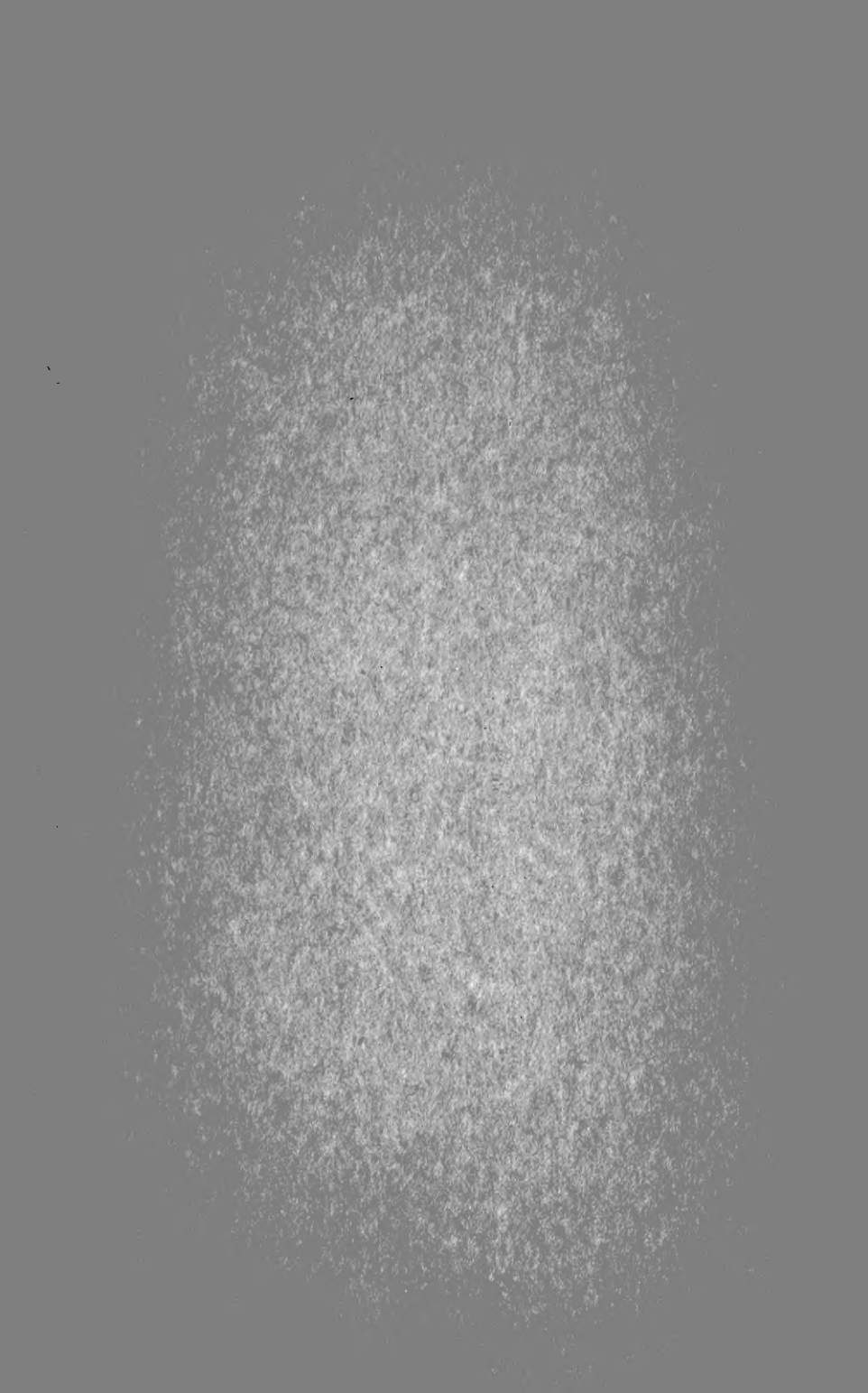
The sharp, clear, resonant crack of trees under stress of severest cold, like the breaking of an over-strained cord, and the duller snapping of house timbers, tell of still starlit nights, when the whiskers of the wandering fox are silvered with his breath. In such nights the great horned owl hoots a prophecy of storm. Its fulfillment is heard in a gusty south wind driving a pelting slant of rain against weatherboards and windows and upon the snow till the rush of free brooks falls upon the ear once more.

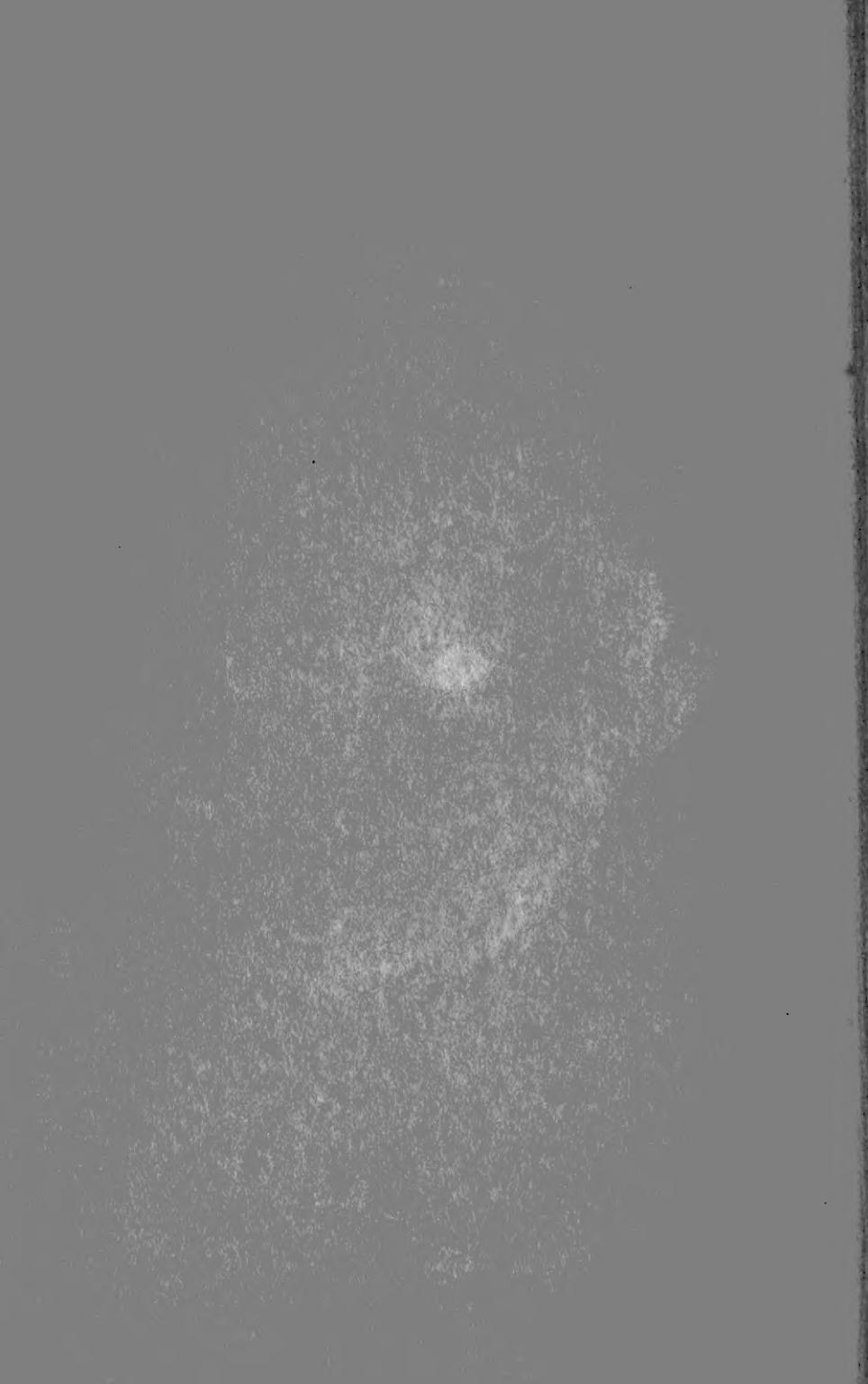
The outlawed crow proclaims his return to such scant forage as the bare fields may yield. The great owl's least cousin sharpens his invisible saw in the softer-breathing evenings. Some morning the first robin pipes his greeting, then from high overhead floats down the heavenly carol of the bluebird, the song sparrow sings blithely again and phoebe calls, and we know, though we only hear of it from them, that spring is here once more.

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