

## IN THE SHADOW OF THE PINES.

By Henry M. Sayres.

THE train had traveled at the fearsome speed of a mile in five minutes. The four original passengers had dwindled to two—Polly and me—and we left the car empty at the edge of the pine-barrens. It was raining. The faint light faded as the wood thickened; the boles of the great pine-trees stood silent and motionless, their wet sides as black as ink, their long limbs interlacing close beneath the low-lying clouds.

How still it was! How deliciously quiet! The birds were silent; the mosquitoes were drowned; only the gentle crunching of the wet sand under the carriage wheels, and the occasional quick rattle of a shrub against the spokes, with the regular thud of the horse's hoofs, and a soft wind that came and went at intervals with a sigh through the pine-needles, and a tinkle of rain-drops on the carriage roof. Over the underbrush, the thickets, the clumps of scrub-oaks, we could set long gray vistas zigzagging between those black trunks, sometimes leading to a momentary glimpse of a dull sky.

Suddenly the trees stood aside; out of the space flashed a blaze of blue light from a hundred racemes of the lupine, the brilliant clusters standing erect above their thicket of palmate leaves. Wide patches of the plant variegated the ground; it bordered the narrow road; it brushed against the wheels; the horse trampled it.

In the quiet and the peace of the pines all such things appear to grow in broad patches, spreading at their own wayward will, and spattering with color the dull sand of the dim wood. "The white-spiked Clethra flower" illuminates the spaces between the segregated scrub-oaks, and lifts its perfumed bloom above the bushy thickets and hedges with an unexpectedness indescribably delightful. The wood is filled with scattered handfuls of the sand-myrtle (*Leiophyllum buxifolium*), its clustered corymbs of white blossoms like misty mounds of foam against the gray sand; the plant grows nowhere but in the pine-barrens. To see an acre of earth so filled with the white cloudiness of those flowers is worth a journey of many

a mile. Each blossom is a delicate little thing, and its exerted stamens produce in the mass a peculiar mistiness when viewed at a short distance, especially in the shade, a pale cloud resting lightly above each low cluster.

The rain dripped gently, and the overseer lifted the flood-gates a trifle, for the water was running off the cranberry bog, where it had been standing for long. Black and glossy as tar, it raced through the passage, leaving a mound of foam that the soft wind caught and scattered in flakes and shattered into a cool spray and dashed against our faces.

The water flows out of the cedar swamps of the New Jersey pine-barrens, where it may lie deep and still and horrid-looking, cold and terrible, a relentless blackness ready to clutch you and draw you into its sunless depths; but lift it out in a tumbler, and its color is rich, transparent as some brilliant wine, bubbling and sparkling in the light, with a delicious taste of the wild woods and an aroma of the untamed places of nature.

We always find what we take with us, as some one has said of the traveler. But the glory of that evening's sunset was not taken with me; it was a part of the place, for nowhere else could those great trees stand so straight and rigid and black against that blazing sky of burnished gold, whence fiery lances goaded at the dun clouds, and pinned a double rainbow across the sky.

As the twilight crept over the landscape, a burst of music flooded the air, a fluting whose liquid notes filled me with happiness; it was an oft-repeated cry of only three tones, but so soft and sweet, so delicious to the ear, that I could listen all night and not weary of its repetitions. It was the persistent cry of a whippoorwill that stood on the wood-pile under the trees, and inundated the world with his melody. It is, perhaps, the sweetest, the most satisfying thing I have ever heard in nature, not even excepting the notes of the song-thrush of the North or of the mocking-bird in the South. The whippoorwill seems incapable of improvement as a musical whistler.



J. Oliver Nugent

Early in the evening the "teacher" came through the aromatic forest, and I was glad of a chance to show my gallantry by "seeing her home," because it gave me an opportunity to pass through the woods by night. The moon struggled out of the broken clouds and sifted through the heavy shadows of the tree-tops, as I returned alone, except for the presence of Polly, who never counts at such times.

When the night breeze swayed the boughs, a dust of stars glittered above us, and the moon gleamed yellow as gold on the patches of Hudsonia that embroidered the road in masses and tufts of bloom, whose hue was the perfection of yellow, a rich and royal color over which a human eye seldom glances until wandering lunatics like Polly and me pass that way. And through the deep, mysterious woods came the whippoorwill's delicious repetitions, monotonous, yet never the same; always varying in expression, in movement, in crescendo, or as the faintest whisper of a distant wail, as he flung his ballad to the sky in a musical frenzy.

The morning broke so still that I could hear the click of the pine-needles as they fell. When a humming-bird swept past and alighted on a low branch, his whirl shocked the silence. For a moment he rested, flashed brilliantly in the sunlight, and was gone.

Footsteps fall silently in that moist sand. The woman in the doorway of the cabin of slabs was talking so loud and volubly that her words drowned the faint rustling of my approach. The incident soon became a laughable proof of the human nature that makes all the world akin, as well as of an expedient to which the country doctor is not seldom driven in self-protection.

"If I was so sick," she was saying, "that I couldn't hold my head up, I wouldn't never send for Dr. Sharp, for like 's not he'd tell me there wasn't nothin' ailed me. That's what he told Jane Simpson. Says he: 'See here, you Jane Simpson, there ain't nothin' ails you 'cept laziness!'"

The resinous warmth of the pines filled the sunny air. The long shadows of the morning barred and streaked the forest. The sand was sprinkled with bunches of the little white *Comandra umbellata*, a leafy, half-shrubby plant rather common

everywhere, yet of great interest, not only by reason of the cluster of delicate hairs which connect the stamens with the calyx lobes, but chiefly because it is both four-parted and five-parted. The specimens in the pine-barrens showed this peculiarity in the flowers of the same umbel-like cluster, and proved themselves true curiosities. But while I was interested and amused by these pleasing little growths something active happened.

With a rumbling whirl of wings, and loud cries and chattering, a woodcock leaped out of the grass at my feet. With shrill calls and screams of pain she wheeled over the bushes, only to return and fall on the earth, where she wallowed in the sand and beat the ground with her wings, as if in the agony of a violent death. That well-known trick of a loving mother to deceive being followed by no result, she stopped her performances with a final series of heart-rending cries and a laughable exhibition of avian gymnastics.

The cause was soon apparent. In the hollow at the foot of a scrub-oak a single young bird was crouching, frightened into semi-unconsciousness.

The nest was nothing but a hollow in the ground, but the young bird's beak rested in a fringe of tiny flowers, the *Krigia Virginica*, a bright yellow blossom much like a dwarf dandelion in general appearance. He had only to stick his nose out of his home to have the perfume and the delights of a natural conservatory, and should have been a happy bird, but he seems not to have been, for he told weird stories and frightful yarns and so lost his pleasant dwelling in the grass under the oaks.

Polly was investigating things, of course, and on her own responsibility, with the usual valuable results. Poised ready to flee, her skirts wrapped about her, she stood pointing to a hole in the ground as big as my finger.

"Come quick," she cried; "here's a snake hole!"

"Snake hole, indeed! It is nothing but the burrow of a spider, the *Tarantula arenicola*, which I am happy to see."

"Well," she says, "that isn't much better; but if you will plug him in, I will stay with you a while longer."

"Your 'him' happens to be a 'her,' and if you will settle down on your heels and

come closer, you will see that she erects a tower of little twigs around the mouth of the burrow. She is an intelligent creature, and when she is hungry, as she always is, she mounts her tower, scans the landscape for a belated ant, or for any wandering insect, and, with a rush from the heights of her building, pounces on him and carries him in. I will dig her out and show you how interesting she is in her personal appearance."

"Oh, no!" says Polly. "If I were you I wouldn't disturb her. I—I—I really think she is more interesting where she is; yes, very much more."

"If it is snakes that you want, Polly, I can get you lots of them, and right around this very spot." Polly comes down on her heels and walks away apparently unconcerned, but there was a paleness where a flush was before tingeing her lovely cheek. It was a sin and a shame to "have fun" with her, but—"Black-snakes almost as long as you are tall, and as they glide across the road, this very identical road, they glisten like silk."

"It is getting late," says Polly; "I really——"

"Then the pine-snakes, harmless creatures, white, blotched with brown, beautiful animals, which I have seen in captivity coil and strike almost with the viciousness of a rattlesnake. There are lots of them in the pine-barrens. They are really gentle creatures, Polly, and I have known a man to carry a living one festooned about his neck. The next time you attend a 'snake show' and see the brave maiden loop snakes around her, you will see pine-snakes painted, for the occasion, into a semblance of the venomous reptiles——"

"I should like to turn back, if you please; not that I have any fear of harmless snakes——"

Her silence became the silence of indignation, but the woods were still with that eternal stillness which a chirp of a bird startles into great waves of vibration. The blue flames of the lupine blazed among the trees, the sand-myrtle scattered its white mistiness between the trunks, a crowd of unfurled fern-fronds thronged a vacant space in the woody aisles, where probably three hundred stood crowded together, and lifted their bowed heads high above the damp sand.

Polly forgot the snakes and the spiders, and laughed as she said: "The pigmy bishops have adjourned their convention, and have left their crosiers sticking in the earth. Do you suppose they ran away from us?"

The pine-barrens of New Jersey are a fertile field for the zoölogist, the botanist, and the microscopist, to say nothing of the poet, although, to judge from exoteric signs, the poet is getting scarce. But the botanist comes here, while the zoölogist and the microscopist are not unknown.

For the botanist the region is a neutral ground where the Northern and the Southern flowers meet and fraternize. For the zoölogist, perhaps, the locality is not so plentifully supplied with rarities that stir his anatomical proclivities; but here the microscopist may be sure of finding many objects in the water, if not on the land, which have never yet been seen by mortal eye. And when such occur, they exist in the greatest profusion.

In my permanent domiciliary habitat, a certain fresh-water alga (*Conferva bombycina*) occurs rarely and in small quantity; but in the pine-barrens it floats on the water of the cranberry-bogs in great sheets; as the water recedes, it dries into a substance like tissue paper and drapes and festoons the ditches. Its filaments were more profusely sprinkled with the empty loriceæ of dead infusoria than I remember ever to have seen, the species many, and, by the pressure of the interlacing algæ, so deformed into a remarkable series of crooked sheaths that there seemed to have been a contest of growth between the infusorial animals and the algæ, with a victory for the plants.

A row of obconical pitfalls of the antlion larvæ borders the path, but when Polly sees the terrible mandibles of the one which I disinter, she vows the sun is setting, and that the time has arrived for us to go to our temporary home.

A whippoorwill was sitting on the fence; I greeted him with joy even as he hurled himself into the twilight. Presently he returned, and Polly's murmurs about a snake as big as a tree were lost in that melodious ballad of grief with which the forest softly echoed under the moonlight.