

BETWEEN THE LUPIN AND THE LAUREL

(From Henry Van Dyke's "Days Off and other Digressions, July 10, 1907)

No other time of the year, on our northern Atlantic seaboard, is so alluring, so delicate and subtle in its charm, as that which follows the fading of the bright blue lupins in the meadows and along the banks of the open streams, and precedes the rosy flush of myriad laurels in full bloom on the half-wooded hillsides, and in the forest glades, and under the lofty shadow of the groves of yellow pine. Then, for a little while, the spring delays to burgeon into summer: the woodland maid lingers at the garden gate of womanhood, reluctant to enter and leave behind the wild sweetness of freedom and uncertainty.

Winter is gone for good and all. There is no fear that he will come sneaking back with cold hands to fetch something that he has forgotten. Nature is secure of another season of love, of mating, of germination, of growth, of maturity -- a fair four months in which the joyful spirit of life may have its way and work its will. The brown earth seems to thrill and quicken everywhere with new impulses which transform it into springing grass and overflowing flowers. The rivers are at their best: strong and clear and musical, the turbulence of early floods departed, the languor of later droughts not yet appearing. The shrunken woods expand; the stringent, sparkling wintry stars grow mild and liquid, shining with a tremulous and tender light; the whole world seems larger, happier, more full of untold, untried possibilities. The air vibrates with wordless promises, calls, messages, beckonings; and fairy-tales are told by all the whispering leaves.

Yet though the open season is now secure, it is not yet settled. No chance of a relapse into the winter's death, but plenty of change in the unfolding of the summer's life. There are still caprices and wayward turns in nature's moods; cold nights when the frost-elves are hovering in the upper air; windy mornings which shake and buffet the tree-tassels and light embroidered leaves; sudden heats of tranquil noon through which the sunlight pours like a flood of eager love, pressing to create new life.

Birds are still mating; and quarrelling, too. Their songs, their cries of agitation and expectancy, their call notes, their lyrical outpourings of desire are more varied and more copious than ever. All day long they are singing, and every hour on the wing, coming up from the southward, passing on to the northward, fluttering through the thickets, exploring secret places, choosing homes and building nests. In every coppice there is a running to and fro, a creeping, a scampering, and a leaping of wild creatures. At the roots of the bushes and weeds and sedges, in the soft recesses of the moss, and through the intricate tangle of withered grass-blades pierced with bright-green shoots, there is a manifold stir of insect life. In the air millions of gauzy wings are quivering, swarms of ethereal, perishable creatures rising and falling and circling in mystical dances of joy. Fish are leaping along the stream. The night breeze trembles with the shrill, piercing chorus of the innumerable hylas.

Late trees, like the ash, the white oak, the butternut, are still delaying to put forth their full foliage; veiled in tender, transparent green, or flushed with faint pink, they stand as if they were waiting for a set time; and the tiny round buds on the laurels, clustered in countless umbels of bright rose among the dark green, glistening leaves, are closed, hiding their perfect beauty until the day appointed. It is the season of the unfulfilled desire, the eager hope, the coming surprise. To-day the world is beautiful; but to-morrow, next day -- who knows when? -- something more beautiful is coming, something new, something perfect. This is the lure of wild nature between the lupin and the laurel.

At such a season it is hard to stay at home. The streets all seem to lead into the country, and one longs to follow their leading, out into the highway, on into the winding lane, on into the wood-road, on and on, until one comes to that mysterious and delightful ending, (told of in the familiar saying,) where the road finally dwindles into a squirrel track and runs up a tree not an ending at all, you see, but really a beginning! For

there is the tree; and if you climb it, who knows what new landscape, what lively adventure, will open before you? At any rate, you will get away from the tyranny of the commonplace, the conventional, the methodical, which transforms the rhythm of life into a logarithm. Even a small variation, a taste of surprise, will give you what you need as a spring tonic: the sense of escape, a day off.

Living in a university town, and participating with fidelity in its principal industry, I find that my own particular nightmare of monotony takes the form of examination papers -- quires of them, reams of them, stacks of them -- a horrid incubus, always oppressive, but then most unendurable when the book-room begins to smell musty in the morning, and the fire is unlit upon the hearth, and last night's student-lamp is stuccoed all over with tiny gnats, and the breath of the blossoming grape is wafted in at the open window, and the robins, those melodious rowdies, are whistling and piping over the lawn and through the trees in voluble mockery of the professor's task. "Come out," they say, "come out! Why do you look in a book? Double, double, toil and trouble! Give it up -- tup, tup, tup! Come away and play for a day. What do you know? Let it go. You're as dry as a chip, chip, chip! Come out, won't you? will you?"

Truly, these examination questions that I framed with such pains look very dull and tedious now -- a desiccation of the beautiful work of the great poets. And these answers that the boys have wrought out with such pains, on innumerable pads of sleazy white paper, how little they tell me of what the fellows really know and feel! Examination papers are "requisite and necessary," of course; I can't deny it -- requisite formalities and necessary absurdities. But to turn the last page of the last pad, and mark it with a red pencil and add it to the pile of miseries past, and slip away from books to nature, from learning to life, between the lupin and the laurel-that is a pleasure doubled by release from pain.

I think a prize should be offered for the discovery of good places to take a free and natural outing within easy reach of the great city and the routine of civilized work -- just-over-the-fence retreats, to which you can run off without much preparation, and from which you can come back again before your little world discovers your absence. That was the charm of Hopkinson Smith's sketch, "A Day at Laguerre's"; and an English writer who calls himself "A Son of the Marshes" has written a delightful book of interviews with birds and other wild things, which bears the attractive title, "Within an Hour of London Town." But I would make it a condition of the prize that the name of the hiding-place should not be published, lest the careless, fad-following crowd should flock thither and spoil it. Let the precious news be communicated only by word of mouth, or by letter, as a confidence and gift of friendship, so that none but the like-minded may strike the trail to the next-door remnant of Eden.

It was thus that my four friends -- Friends in need as well as in deed -- told to me, one of "the world's people," toiling over my benumbing examination papers, their secret find of a little river in South Jersey, less than an hour from Philadelphia, where one could float in a canoe through mile after mile of unbroken woodland, and camp at night in a bit of wilderness as wildly fair as when the wigwams of the Lenni-Lenape were hidden among its pine groves. The Friends said that they "had a concern" to guide me to their delectable retreat, and that they hoped the "way would open" for me to come.

Canoes and tents and camp-kit? "That will all be provided; it is well not to be anxious concerning these sublunary things." Mosquitoes? "Concerning this, also, thee must learn to put thy trust in Providence; yet there is a happy interval, as it were, between the fading of the hepatica and the blooming of the mosquito, when the woods of South Jersey are habitable for man, and it would be most prudent to choose this season for the exercise of providential trust regarding mosquitoes." Examination papers? Duty? "Surely thee must do what thee thinks will do most good, and follow the inward voice. And if it calls thee to stay with the examination papers, or if it calls thee to go with us, whichever way, thee will be resigned to obey." Fortunately, there was no doubt about the inward voice; it was echoing the robins; it was calling me to go out

like Elijah and dwell under a juniper-tree I replied to the Friends in the words of one of their own preachers: "I am resigned to go, or resigned to stay, but most resigned to go"; and we went.

The statue of William Penn seemed to look benignantly down upon us as we passed, bag and bundle in hand, along the regular Philadelphia shortcut which leads through the bowels of the Courthouse, from the Broad Street station to John Wanamaker's store. Philadelphians always have the air of doing something very modern, hurried, and time-saving when they lead you through that short-cut. But we were not really in a hurry; we had all the time there is; we could afford to gape a little in the shop-windows. The spasmodic Market Street trolley-ear and the deliberate Camden ferry-boat were rapid enough for us. The gait of the train on the Great Sandy and Oceanic Railway was neither too fast nor too slow. Even the deserted condition of Hummingtown, where we disembarked about eleven o'clock in the morning, and found that the entire population had apparently gone to a Decoration Day ball-game, leaving post-office, telegraph station, fruit store, bakery, all closed -- even this failure to meet our expectations did not put us out of humour with the universe, or call forth rude words on the degeneracy of modern times.

Our good temper was imperturbable; for had we not all "escaped as a bird from the hand of the fowler" -- Master Thomas from the mastery of his famous boarding-school in Old Chester, and Friends Walter and Arthur from the uninspired scripture of their ledgers and day-books, and I from the incubation of those hideous examination papers, and the gentle Friend William from his -- there! I have forgotten what particular monotony William was glad to get away from; but I know it was from something. I could read it in his face; in his pleased, communicative silence; in the air of almost reckless abandon with which he took off his straight-breasted Quaker coat, and started out in his shirt-sleeves to walk with Walter, ahead of the cart which carried our two canoes and the rest of us over to the river.

It was just an ordinary express wagon, with two long, heavy planks fastened across the top of it. On these the canoes were lashed, with their prows projecting on either flank of the huge, pachydermatous horse, who turned his head slowly from one side to the other, as he stalked along the level road, and looked back at his new environment with stolid wonder. He must have felt as if he were suffering "a sea change," and going into training for Neptune's stud. The driver sat on the dashboard between the canoes; and Master Thomas, Arthur, and I were perched upon the ends of the planks with our feet dangling over the road. It was not exactly what one would call an elegant equipage, but it rolled along.

The road was of an uncompromising straightness. It lay across the slightly undulating sandy plain like a long yellow ruler; and on each side were the neatly marked squares and parallelograms of the little truck farms, all cultivated by Italians. Their new and unabashed frame houses were freshly painted in incredible tones of carrot yellow, pea green, and radish pink. The few shade trees and the many fruit trees, with whitewashed trunks, were set out in unbending regularity of line. The women and children were working in the rows of strawberries which covered acre after acre of white sand with stripes of deep green. Some groups of people by the wayside were chattering merrily together in the language which Byron calls

"That soft bastard Latin
Which melts like kisses from a woman's mouth."

It was a scene of foreign industry and cheerfulness, a bit of little Italy transplanted. Only the landscape was distinctly not Italian, but South Jersey to the core. Yet the people seemed at home and happy in it. Perhaps prosperity made up to them for the loss of picturesqueness.

At New Prussia the road was lifted by a little ridge, and for a few minutes we travelled through another European country. Two young men were passing ball in front of a beer saloon. "Vot's der news?" said one of them in a strong German accent. We were at a loss for an answer, as it was rather a dull time in international

politics; but Master Thomas began to say something about the riots in Russia. "Russia hell!" said the young man. "How's der ball-game? Was our nine of Hummingtown ahead yet?" We could give no information on this important subject, but we perceived that New Prussia was already Americanized.

A mile or so beyond this the road dipped gently into a shallow, sparsely wooded valley and we came to a well-built stone bridge which spanned, with a single narrow arch, the little river of our voyage. It was like a big brook, flowing with deep, brown current out of a thicket, and on through a small cranberry bog below the bridge. Here we launched and loaded our canoes, and went down with the stream, through a bit of brushy woodland, till we found a good place for luncheon. For though it was long past noon and we were very hungry, we wanted to get really into the woods before we broke bread together.

Scanty woods they were, indeed; just a few scrub pines growing out of a bank of clean white sand. But we spread a rubber blanket in their thin shade, and set forth our repast of biscuits and smoked beef and olives, and fell to eating as heartily and merrily as if it had been a banquet. The yellow warblers and the song sparrows were flitting about us; and two cat-birds and a yellow-throat were singing from the thicket on the opposite shore. There were patches of snowy sand-myrtle and yellow poverty-plant growing around our table; tiny, hardy, heath-like creatures, delicately wrought with bloom as if for a king's palace; irrepressible and lovely offspring of the yearning for beauty that hides in the poorest place of earth. In a still arm of the stream, a few yards above us, was a clump of the long, naked flower-scapes of the golden-club, now half entered upon their silvery stage.

It was strange what pleasure these small gifts of blossom and song brought to us. We were in the mood which Wordsworth describes in the lines written in his pocket-copy of "The Castle of Indolence":

"There did they dwell, from earthly labour free,
As happy spirits as were ever seen;
If but a bird, to keep them company,
Or butterfly sate down, they were, I ween,
As pleased as if the same had been a Maiden-queen."

But our "earthly labour" began again when we started down the stream; for now we had fairly entered the long strip of wilderness which curtains its winding course. On either hand the thickets came down so close to the water that there were no banks left; just woods and water blending; and the dark topaz current swirling and gurgling through a clump of bushes or round the trunk of a tree, as if it did not care what path it took so long as it got through.

Alders and pussy-willows, viburnums, clethras, chokecherries, swamp maples, red birches, and all sorts of trees and shrubs that are water-loving, made an intricate labyrinth for the stream to thread; and through the tangle, cat-briers, blackberries, fox grapes, and poison ivy were interlaced.

Worst of all was the poison ivy, which seemed here to deserve its other name of poison oak, for it was more like a tree than a vine, flinging its knotted branches from shore to shore, and thrusting its pallid, venomous blossoms into our faces. Walter was especially susceptible to the influence of this poison, so we put him in the middle of our canoe, and I, being a veteran and immune, took the bow-paddle. It was no easy task to guide the boat down the swift current, for it was bewilderingly crooked, twisting and turning upon itself in a way that would have made the far-famed Mæander look like a straight line. Many a time it ran us deep into the alders, or through a snarl of thorn-set vines, or crowded us under the trunk of an overhanging tree. We glimpsed the sun through the young leaves, now on our right hand, now on our left, now in front of us, and now over our shoulders. After several miles of this curliewurlie course, the incoming of the Penny

Pot Stream on the left broadened the flowing trail a little. Not far below that, the Hospitality Branch poured in its abundant waters on the right, and we went floating easily down a fair, open river.

There were banks now, and they were fringed with green borders of aquatic plants, rushes, and broad spatter-docks, and flags, and arrow-heads, and marsh-marigolds, and round-leaved pond-lilies, and pointed pickerel-weed. The current was still rapid and strong, but it flowed smoothly through the straight reaches and around the wide curves. On either hand the trees grew taller and more stately. The mellow light of afternoon deepened behind them, and the rich cloud colours of approaching sunset tinged the mirror of the river with orange and rose. We floated into a strip of forest. The stream slackened and spread out, broadening into the head of a pond. On the left, there was a point of higher land, almost like a low bluff, rising ten or twelve feet above the water and covered with a grove of oaks and white pines. Here we beached our canoes and made our first camp.

A slender pole was nailed horizontally between two trees, and from this the shelter tent was stretched with its sloping roof to the breeze and its front open toward the pond. There were no balsam or hemlock boughs for the beds, so we gathered armfuls of fallen leaves and pine needles, and spread our blankets on this rude mattress. Arthur and Walter cut wood for the fire. Master Thomas and William busied themselves with the supper. There was a famous dish of scrambled eggs, and creamed potatoes, and bacon, and I know not what else. We ate till we could eat no more, and then we sat in the wide-open tent, with the camp-fire blazing in front of us, and talked of everything under the stars.

I like the Quaker speech: the gentle intimacy of their "little language," with its quaint "thees" and "thous," and the curious turn they give to their verbs, disregarding the formalities of grammar. "Will thee go," "has thee seen," "does thee like"-that is the way they speak it; an unjustifiable way, I know, but it sounds pleasantly. I like the Quaker spirit and manners, at least as I have found them in my friends: sober but not sad, plain but very considerate, genuinely simple in the very texture of their thoughts and feelings, and not averse to that quiet mirth which leaves no bitter taste behind it. One thing that I cannot understand in Charles Lamb is his confession, in the essay on "Imperfect Sympathies," that he had a prejudice against Quakers. But then I remember that one of his best bits of prose is called "A Quaker's Meeting," and one of his best poems is about the Quaker maiden, Hester Savory, and one of his best lovers and companions was the broad-brim Bernard Barton. I conclude that there must be different kinds of Quakers, as there are of other folks, and that my particular Friends belong to the tribe of Bernard and Hester, and their spiritual ancestry is in the same line with the poet Whittier.

Yet even these four are by no means of one pattern. William is the youngest of the group, but the oldest-fashioned Friend, still clinging very closely to the old doctrines and the old ritual of silent simplicity, and wearing the straight-cut, collarless coat, above which his youthful face looks strangely ascetic and serene. I can imagine him taking joyfully any amount of persecution for his faith, in the ancient days; but in these tolerant modern times, he has the air of waiting very tranquilly and with good humour for the world to see that the old ways are the best, and to come round to them again.

Walter and Arthur are Young Quakers, men of their time, diligent in business, fond of music and poetry, loyal to the society of their fathers, but more than willing to see its outward manners and customs, and even some of its ways of teaching, quietly modified to meet the needs and conditions of the present. In appearance you could hardly tell them from the world's people; yet I perceive that inwardly the meeting-house has made its indelible mark upon them in a certain poise of mind and restraint of temper, a sweet assurance of unseen things, and a mind expectant of spiritual visitations.

Master Thomas, the leader of our expedition, is a veteran school-teacher, in one of the largest and most successful of the Friends' boarding-schools. To him I think there is neither old nor new in doctrine; there is

only the truth, and the only way to be sure of it is by living. He is a fervent instructor, to whom an indifferent scholar is a fascinating problem, and a pupil who "cannot understand mathematics" offers a new adventure. But part of his instruction, and the part to which he gives himself most ardently, is the knowledge and love of the great out-of-doors. Every summer he runs a guest-camp in the Adirondacks, and in the fall he gives a big camp-supper for the old pupils of his school, who come back by the hundred to renew their comradeship with "Master Thomas." It is good to have an academic title like that. Arthur and William and Walter are among his old boys, and they still call him by that name. But it is partly because he has also been their master in fire-making, and tent-pitching, and cooking, and canoe-building, and other useful arts which are not in the curriculum of book-learning.

Here, then, I have sketched the friends who sat with me before the glowing logs on that cool, starry night, within a few miles of the railroad and not far away from the roaring town, yet infinitely deep in the quietude of nature's heart. Of the talk I can remember little, except that it was free and friendly, natural and good. But one or two stories that they told me of a famous old Philadelphia Quaker, Nicholas Waln, have stuck in my memory.

His piety was tempered with a strong sense of humour, and on one occasion when he was visiting a despondent sister, he was much put out by her plaintive assertions that she was going to die. "I have no doubt," said he finally, "but that thou wilt; and when thou gets to heaven give my love to the Apostle Paul, and tell him I wish he would come back to earth and explain some of the hard things in his epistles." At another time he overtook a young woman Friend in worldly dress, upon which he remarked, "Satin without, and Satan within." But this time he got as good as he gave, for the young woman added, "And old Nick behind!" When it was the fashion to wear a number of capes, one above another, on a great-coat, Nicholas met a young acquaintance dressed in the mode. Taking hold of one of the capes, the old Quaker asked innocently what it was. "That is Cape Hatteras," said the pert youth. "And this?" said Nicholas, touching another. "Oh, that is Cape Henlopen," was the answer. "Then, I suppose," said Nicholas gravely, pointing to the young man's head, "this must be the lighthouse." I think that Charles Lamb, despite his imperfect sympathy with Quakers, would have liked this turn to the conversation.

Bedtime comes at last, even when you are lodging at the Sign of the Beautiful Star. There were a few quiet words read from a peace-giving book, and a few minutes of silent thought in fellowship, and then each man pulled his blanket round him and slept as if there were no troubles in the world.

Certainly there were none waiting for us in the morning; for the day rose fresh and fair, and we had nothing to do but enjoy it. After fishing for an hour or two, to supply our larder, we paddled down the pond, which presently widened into quite a lake, ending in a long, Low dam with trees growing all across it. Here was the forgotten village of Watermouth, founded before the Revolution, and once the seat of a flourishing iron industry, but now stranded between two railways, six miles on either side of it, and basking on the warm sand-hills in a painless and innocent decay.

Watermouth had done nothing to deserve ill fortune. But the timber which had once been floated down its river was all cut and gone; and the bog-iron which had once been smelted in its furnaces was all used up; and the forest glass-makers and charcoal-burners who had once traded in its store had all disappeared; and the new colonies of fruit-growers and truck-farmers from Italy and Germany did not like to settle quite so far from the railway; and there was nothing left for Watermouth but to sit in the sun and doze, while one family after another malted away, and house after house closed its windows and its doors.

The manor-house stood in spacious grounds sloping gently down to the southern shore of the lake, well planted with a variety of shade trees and foreign evergreens, but overgrown with long grass and straggling weeds. Master Thomas and I landed, and strolled through the neglected lawn toward the house, in search of a

possible opportunity to buy some fresh eggs. The long, pillared veranda, with its French windows opening to the floor; the wide double door giving entrance to a central hall; a score of slight and indefinable signs told us that the mansion had seen its days of comfort and elegance. But there were other signs -- a pillar leaning out of plumb, a bit of railing sagging down, a board loose at the corner -- which seemed to speak of the pluperfect tense. In a fragment of garden at one side, where a broken trellis led to an arbor more than half hidden by vines, we saw a lady, clad in black, walking slowly among the bewildered roses and clumps of hemerocallis, stooping now and then to pluck a flower or tenderly to lift and put aside a straggling branch.

"This is plainly the mistress of the house," said Master Thomas; "does thee think that we could make bold to speak with her upon the subject of fresh eggs -- "

"I think," said I, "that with thy friendly tact thee could speak with anybody upon any subject."

"But my coat?" said Master Thomas, for he had left it in the boat. "'Tis a warm day, Master Thomas," I answered, "and doubtless the lady will know that thee has a coat, when she hears thee speak. But in any event, it is wise not to think too much of these mundane things. Let us go up."

So we made our salutations, stated our names and our occupations, and described the voyage which had brought us to Watermouth, in a way that led naturally to an explanation of our present need and desire for fresh eggs: though indeed it was hardly necessary to be explicit on that point, for our little tin pail betrayed us as foragers. The lady in black received us with gracious dignity, identified and placed us without difficulty (indeed she knew some relation of each of us), and gave us hospitable assurance that our wants in the matter of eggs could easily be satisfied. Meantime we must come up to the house with her and rest ourselves.

Rest was not an imperative necessity for us just then, but we were glad to see the interior of the old mansion. There was the long drawing-room, with its family portraits running back into the eighteenth century -- one of them an admirable painting by Sully -- and the library, with its tall book-shelves, now empty, and engravings and autographs hanging on the walls. The lady in black was rather sad; for her father, a distinguished publicist and man of letters, had built this house; and her grandfather, a great iron-master, had owned most of the land hereabouts; and the roots and tendrils of her memory were all entwined about the place; but now she was dismantling it and closing it up, preparatory to going away, perhaps to selling it.

By this time the tin pail had come in, filled with the nutritious fruit of the industrious and faithful hen. So we said farewell to the lady in black, with suitable recognition of her courtesy and kindness, and not without some silent reflections on the mutability of human affairs. Here had been a fine estate, a great family, a prosperous industry firmly established, now fading away like smoke. But I do not believe the lady in black will ever disappear entirely from Watermouth while she lives; for is there not the old meeting-house, a hundred years old (with the bees' nest in the weather-boarding), for her to watch over, and care for, and worship in?

The young men were waiting for us below the dam. Here was a splendid water-power running away almost idle. For the great iron forge, with its massive stone buildings, standing (if the local tradition is correct) on the site where the first American cannon-balls had been cast for the Revolutionary War, and where that shrewd Rhode Islander, Gen. Nathanael Greene, had invested some of the money he made in army contracts, had been put out of business many years ago by the development of iron-making in North Jersey and Pennsylvania. An attempt was made to turn it into a wood-pulp factory; but that had failed because the refractory yellow pine was full of hard knots that refused to let themselves be ground into pulp. Now a feeble little saw-mill was running from time to time in one corner of the huge edifice; and the greater part of the river out of work was foaming and roaring in wasteful beauty over the gates of the dam.

It was here, on the slopes of the open fields and on the dry sides of the long embankment, that we saw the faded remnants of the beauty with which the lupins had surrounded Watermouth a few days ago. The innumerable plants with their delicate palmate leaves were still fresh and vigorous; no drought can wither them even in the driest soil, for their roots reach down to the hidden waters. But their winged blossoms, with which a little while since they had "blued the earth," as Thoreau says, were now almost all gone; as if a countless flock of blue butterflies had taken flight and vanished. Only here and there one could see little groups of belated flowers, scraps of the cœrulean colour, like patches of deep-blue sky seen through the rents in a drifting veil of clouds.

But the river called us away from the remembrance of the lupins to follow the promise of the laurels. How charming was the curve of that brown, foam-flecked stream, as it rushed swiftly down, from pool to pool, under the ancient, overhanging elms and willows and sycamores! We gave ourselves to the current, and darted swiftly past the row of weather-beaten houses on the left bank, into the heart of the woods again.

Here the forest was dense, lofty, overarching. The tall silver maple, the black ash, the river birch, the swamp white oak, the sweet gum and the sour gum, and a score of other trees closed around the course of the stream as it swept along with full, swirling waters. The air was full of a diffused, tranquil green light, subdued yet joyous, through which flakes and beams of golden sunshine flickered and sifted downward, as if they were falling into some strange, ethereal medium -- something half liquid and half aërial, midway between an atmosphere and the still depths of a fairy sea.

The spirit of enchantment was in the place; brooding in the delicate, luminous midday twilight; hushing the song of the strong-flowing river to a humming murmur; casting a spell of beautiful immobility on the slender flower-stalks and fern-fronds and trailing shrubberies of the undergrowth, while the young leaves of the tree-tops, far overhead, were quivering and dancing in the sunlight and the breeze. Here Oberon and Titania might sleep beneath a bower of motionless royal Osmunda. Here Puck might have a noon-tide council with Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed, holding forth to them in whispers, beneath the green and purple sounding-board of a Jack-in-the-Pulpit. Here, even in this age of reason, the mystery of nature wove its magic round the curious mind of man,

"Annihilating all that's made,
To a green thought in a green shade."

Do you remember how old Andrew Marvell goes on from those two lovely lines, in his poem?

"Here at the fountain's sliding foot,
Or at some fruit-tree's mossy root,
Casting the body's vest aside,
My soul into the boughs does glide;
There, like a bird, it sits and sings,
Then whets and claps its silver wings,
And, till prepared for longer flight,
Waves in its plumes the various light."

There were many beautiful shrubs and bushes coming into bloom around us as we drifted down the stream. Two of the fairest bore the names of nymphs. One was called after Leucothoë, "the white goddess," and its curved racemes of tiny white bells hanging over the water were worthy emblems of that pure queen who leaped into the sea with her babe in her arms to escape from the frenzy of Athamas. The other was named for Andromeda; and the great Linnaeus, who gave the name, thus describes his thought in giving it: "*Andromeda polifolia* was now in its highest beauty, decorating the marshy grounds in a most agreeable

manner. The flowers are quite blood-red before they expand, but when full-grown the corolla is of a flesh-colour. As I contemplated it, I could not help thinking of Andromeda as described by the poets; and the more I meditated upon their descriptions, the more applicable they seemed to the little plant before me. Andromeda is represented by them as a virgin of most exquisite and unrivalled charms.... This plant is always fixed on some little furry hillock in the midst of the swamps, as Andromeda herself was chained to the rock in the sea, which bathed her feet as the fresh water does the roots of the plant. Dragons and venomous serpents surrounded her, as toads and other reptiles frequent the abode of her vegetable resembler. As the distressed virgin east down her face through excessive affliction, so does this rosy coloured flower hang its head.... At length comes Perseus in the shape of summer, dries up the surrounding water and destroys the monsters."

But more lovely than any of the shrubs along the river was that small tree known as the sweet bay or the swamp laurel. Of course it is not a laurel at all, but a magnolia (*Magnolia glauca*), and its glistening leaves, dark green above, silvery beneath, are set around the large, solitary flowers at the ends of the branches, like backgrounds of malachite, to bring out the perfection of a blossom carved in fresh ivory. What creamy petals are these, so thick, so tenderly curved around the cone-like heart of the flower's fertility! They are warm within, so that your finger can feel the soft glow in the centre of the blossoms. But it is not for you to penetrate into the secret of their love mystery. Leave that to the downy bee, the soft-winged moth, the flying beetle, who, seeking their own pleasure, carry the life-bestowing pollen from flower to flower. Your heavy hand would bruise the soft flesh and discolor its purity. Be content to feast your eyes upon its beauty, and breathe its wonderful fragrance, floating on the air like the breath of love in the south and wild summer.

About the middle of the afternoon, after passing through miles of enchanted forest, unbroken by sign of human habitation, we

"Came unto a land
In which it seemed always afternoon."

Low-rolling ridges of gravel, clothed with pine and oak, came down along the river. The bank on the right rose higher, and, at a sharp angle in the stream, lifted itself into a bluff-like point. Opposite was the serpentine course of the Dead River, coiling through an open marsh-meadow. Below the junction of the two streams our own river flowed swiftly, through a straight reach, to the mouth of the still lagoon where Mare Run came in.

Here we made our second camp, on the point, among the pines and the hollies. For here, at last, we were in the heart of the region of laurels, which we had come to see. All along the river we had found some of them, just beginning to open their flowers, here and there. But above and below the mouth of the Dead River the banks and ridges, under the high shadow of the pines, were crowded with shining clumps of the *Kalmia latifolia*, and something in the soil and exposure, or perhaps even the single day of warm sunshine that had passed since we began our voyage, had brought them already into the young flood of bloom.

I have seen the flame azaleas at their bright hour of consummation in the hill country of central Georgia-lakes of tranquil and splendid fire spreading far away through the rough-barked colonnades of the pineries. I have seen the thickets of great rhododendrons on the mountains of Pennsylvania in coronation week, when the magic of June covered their rich robes of darkest green with countless sceptres, crowns, and globes of white bloom divinely tinged with rose: superb, opulent, imperial flowers. I have seen the Magnolia Gardens near Charleston when their Arabian Nights' dream of colour was unfolding beneath the dark cypresses and moss-bannered live-oaks. I have seen the tulip and hyacinth beds of Holland rolled like a gorgeous carpet on the meadows beneath the feet of Spring; and the royal gardens of Kew in the month when the rose is queen

of all the flowers; but never have I seen an efflorescence more lovely, more satisfying to the eye, than that of the high laurel along the shores of the unknown little river in South Jersey.

Cool, pure, and virginal in their beauty, the innumerable clusters of pink and white blossoms thronged the avenues of the pine woods, and ranged themselves along the hillsides and sloping banks, and trooped down by cape and promontory to reflect their young loveliness in the flowing stream. It was as if some quiet and shadowy region of solitude had been suddenly invaded by companies of maidens attired for a holiday and joyously confident of their simple charms. The dim woodland was illumined with the blush of conscious pleasure.

Seen at a distance the flower clusters look like big hemispheres of flushed snow. But examine them closely and you see that each of the rounded umbels is compounded of many separate blossoms -- shallow, half-translucent cups poised on slender stems of pale green. The cup is white, tinted more or less deeply with rose-pink, the colour brightest along the rim and on the outside. The edge is scalloped into five points, and on the outer surface there are ten tiny projections around the middle of the cup. Looking within, you find that each of these is a little red' hollow made to receive the crimson tip of a curving anther, cunningly bent like a spring, so that the least touch may loosen it and scatter the pollen. There is no flower in the world more exquisitely fashioned than this. It is the emblem of a rustic maid in the sweet prime of her morning.

We were well content with our day's voyage and our parting camp on the river. We had done no harm; no accident had befallen us; we had seen many lovely things and heard music from warbler and vireo, thrush and wren, all day long. Even now a wood thrush closed his last descant in flute-like notes across the river. Night began silently to weave her dusky veil upon the vast loom of the forest. The pink glow had gone from the flower-masses around us; whitely they glimmered through the deepening shadows, and stood like gentle ghosts against the dark. To-morrow we must paddle down to the village where the railroad crosses the river, and hurry back to civilization and work. But to-night we were still very far off; and we should sleep at the foot of a pine-tree, beneath the stars, among the virgin laurels.

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