

My Adopted Country 1832

Six Years in The Bush.

Attributed to Thomas Need & Susanna Moodie

1838

On returning to England, after a residence of nearly six years in the Backwoods of Upper Canada, the author of the following pages found himself an object of some curiosity. His habits of life in the Bush were made the theme of minute enquiry, and familiar and every day occurrences listened to with interest. Having kept a rough journal during his absence, he was enabled to circulate it among his friends, several of whom suggested that its contents might prove interesting to a portion of the public, and instructive to future emigrants. In compliance with this opinion, he put his note-book into the hands of a friend, to select such extracts as might seem likely to interest the English reader, and prepare them for the press.

Of himself it may be proper to state, that after he had graduated at Oxford, with a view to one of the learned professions, a strong desire to try his fortunes in the West came over him. The resolution though not encouraged, was not thwarted, by his friends, through whose kind assistance he was enabled to carry it into execution.

While these pages, however, are passing through the press, he will be returning across the broad Atlantic, to the home and country of his adoption ; where he prays that the measures of the British government may meet with approbation, and be found adapted to the wants and feelings of his fellow subjects.

May, 1838.

I.

Arrival at New York—Courtesy of American Authorities—Voyage to Albany—Embark on Grand Erie Canal—Night on Board Canal Boat—Frog Concert—Yankee Bushman—Kingston—Hulks of Psyche and St. Lawrence—Irish Emigrants—Canada Land Company—Toronto.

MAY 10, 1832. The regularity and despatch of the New York and Liverpool packets are so generally known, that I need only state, on the thirtieth day after our departure from England we came safely to anchor in the harbour of New York. As the cholera was at that time confined to England and the old Continent, we naturally expected a tedious detention in the quarantine ground ; but, to our great delight, the medical officer who boarded the vessel reported so favorably on our state of health that permission was immediately granted us to land. This unlooked-for courtesy, and the subsequent civil treatment I experienced from the Custom House officers, gave me a very favorable first impression of the conduct of American authorities to strangers.

The city of New York—its magnificent Broadway—its harbour and hotels—have been often described. I may therefore proceed to say that in less than a week I took my leave of the crowded Washington hotel, and its well-spread board, at which, from the novelty of my situation, as well as the astonishing rapidity with which the viands disappeared, I had sat like Tantalus of old—famished in the midst of apparent plenty—and embarked on board a steamer for Albany. Nine hours terminated this once adventurous voyage, formerly undertaken by few without prayers for their safe conduct being offered in the churches by friends

at home, and of which the perils were doubtless not a little magnified to the early English settler by their harsh Dutch appellations. Albany has some fine public buildings and excellent shops ; but the practise, also common to parts of the old continent, of taking advantage of the inexperience of a customer, is very disagreeable to an Englishman, and might have proved expensive to me, had not the good-natured captain of the steamer, amongst other useful advice, warned me never to give a store-keeper in the States more than two thirds of his original demand. At Albany we left the “ broad Hudson,” and crossed by the railroad to Schenectady, where a packet boat was waiting to convey us along the Grand Erie canal to Syracuse, and thence by the branch to the town of Oswego on lake Ontario. At Schenectady, a large hair brush and comb, suspended by an iron chain in the public room of the inn, afforded us some amusement. These useful appendages of the toilet we afterwards frequently met with in similar situations, and as every genuine Yankee who takes his meals at the house makes use of them three or four times daily, their office is no sinecure.

The canal boat was over-crowded with passengers, otherwise it might have been an agreeable mode of conveyance. It was drawn along by three horses at a steady pace of about five miles an hour, travelling day and night. Below deck was a small cabin fitted up with sleeping berths for the passengers ; but, in the crowded state of the vessel, I thought it expedient to establish myself on deck for the night, though all the rest of the company went below : this I soon found was wrong, as indeed persons mostly are when they walk out of the course in a strange country. In the early part of the night, the blood-thirsty disposition of a swarm of mosquitoes kept me in a constant state of feverish alarm ; then the frogs of many tribes commenced their ancient concert, making night hideous with their noise, and effectually banishing sleep. I had heard and read of the harmony, if not the sublimity, of a chorus of frogs on this side the Atlantic, before I left England ; but I confess, that in spite of all my poetical associations, the only impression left on me by the visitation was a more distinct conception of the terribleness of the frog plague upon Pharaoh and his Egyptians. Lastly, a cold mizzling rain set in at daybreak, which, after wetting me to the skin, yielded to the influence of the morning sun, just as my fellow passengers began to emerge from their snug berths, and “ guess that the young Englisher would have done better below.”

A good breakfast and a fine warm day soon made amends however for the miseries of the night, and put me in a disposition to admire the mighty work of art by which the waters of the Great Lakes are united with those of the Hudson.

At Syracuse we left the main canal, and were transferred to another boat which conveyed us to Onondaga, celebrated for extensive salt mines, and thence, before night-fall, to the frontier fort and town of Oswego. There, a Kingston steamer received us on board, in company with a travelling menagerie and its keeper, sundry traders and storekeepers, and an old backwoodsman, migrating from the States to the Canadian Bush. He was one of those restless spirits still common on the frontier districts of both countries, who have been not inaptly termed the pioneers of civilisation—his whole life had literally been a pilgrimage, for as soon as he had cleared a few acres of land, with a design to settle, some tempting offer had always induced him to part with them, and take the Bush again. At one time he had amassed some property, but an unlucky speculation had recently swallowed it up, and thrown him back again on his own exertions, at a time of life when most men look to be cared for and supported. He had never talked with a “ genuine Englisher” before, and considered that he ought to hate us cordially ; but a few well-timed attentions, and a disposition to admire the country we had passed through, relaxed his enmity, and disposed him to enter into conversation. He had heard much of the advantages which Canada held out to persons of his habits, but entertained serious doubts of the propriety of a free-born American living under a

King ; these, however, I considerably relieved, by assuring him that the King would not come into the Bush to trouble him ; a fact which, after some consideration, he seemed disposed to admit.

MAY 23. Kingston.—Here every thing denoted that we were once more under our own king's sceptre ; the British colours were flying on the fort—British uniforms glittered in the streets, and the old accustomed signs—the King's Arms, the Queen's Head, and the Crown and Anchor, greeted the eye ; showing as far at least as outward signs could do, that Republican principles found little favor on this side the river. Sir John Colborne was now the familiar name in men's mouths, instead of rough old General Jackson—Sir Isaac Brock superseded Washington, and the deliberations of the provincial Parliament those of Congress.

The chief attraction of Kingston are the Docks, now encumbered with the mouldering hulks of those threatened Leviathans of the lake, the St. Lawrence and Psyche, each pierced for 120 guns. The latter is especially memorable for the unprecedented outlay upon her ; she was first cut out in the rough, then sent to England to be shaped, and finally returned to Kingston to be finished, at a total cost to the nation of one million sterling—The lakes she was intended to navigate are, it is well known, fresh water ; and yet, by a truly Irish oversight, she was fitted with an apparatus for reducing salt water into fresh, in addition to a vast number of water casks. Happily these monuments of national extravagance are gradually perilling, and will cease ere long to afford the traveller ocular confirmation of the Swedish chancellor's quaint though melancholy remark, “ with how little wisdom the affairs of nations are conducted.” In those days, however, England thought only of glory, and “ d—d the expense :” Reform was then a bugbear—Retrenchment an ungentlemanly word—and Joseph Hume was not.

MAY 25. Embarked on board the Great Britain steamer for York Town, or Toronto, as it is now more wisely called—the seat of government for the Upper Province. Our freight consisted chiefly of poor “ exiles of Erin,” away-worn and wretched crew, whose evil destiny was driving them, under the auspices of one of the agents of the Canada Land Company, into the far West. Perhaps no blame can attach to the Company for endeavouring to people their territory as they best can ; but certainly it should be the earnest care of a merciful and provident government at home to protect from imposition, and provide with safe information, all whom poverty, persecution, or other circumstances, drive from her shores. These unfortunates had never heard of the Eastern Districts, or been informed that in sight of where they were then sailing lay a rich and fertile country, where they might have found immediate employment and an abundant livelihood, under as favorable a climate. As it was, they had many hundred miles still to journey in weariness and hunger, to which the burthen of sickness was also added. The men were fine spirited fellows however, for the most part; and I had not the heart to undeceive them, when, in attempting to dry their wives' and children's tears, they appealed to me for a confirmation of the bright prospects they had been told awaited them in their imaginary Canaan of the West.

At Toronto we parted from our less fortunate countrymen. The town lies low, and its first appearance from the water struck us as unprepossessing. There was however a good deal of lake craft in the port ; and though extremely irregular and unfinished, the streets contain several good shops and private houses, some handsome public buildings, and a certain air of bustle and importance which the seat of government must always confer.

The day after our arrival we waited on the Lieutenant Governor, the good and deservedly popular Sir J. Colborne, under whose auspices the colony was rapidly increasing in wealth and respectability. He received us with his usual courtesy; and having read our letters of recommendation, promised to further our purpose of settling in the colony, by procuring us

information, and introducing us to the most capable advisers, of whom, however, he himself proved the most so. We afterwards had the honor of dining at his table, where we met some of the principal residents, who, during our stay and afterwards, treated us in the most kind and hospitable manner. Calls and invitations also followed from most of the principal inhabitants, to whose attention the Lieutenant Governor's acknowledgement is always a ready passport.

II.

Western Tour—Queenston—Sir Isaac Brock—Niagara Fall—Surly Innkeeper—Fourth of June—Provincial Militia—Brantford—Indian reserve—Indian quarrel—Thunder storm— Inn at Oxford—English gentleman's family—St. Thomas—Colonel Talbot—London— Dundas street—Return to Toronto.

MAY 31. Being naturally desirous to see a portion of my adopted country before I took to the Bush, or decided where to pitch my tent, I started with my former companion and an English servant, who, like old Adam, had promised to follow me

“ to the last gasp, with truth and loyalty,”

on a visit to some of the Western Districts. A steam boat conveyed us to Niagara town, where we hired a carriage to take us to the Falls, fourteen miles distant. The road lies chiefly along the river, passing about half way through the pretty village of Queenston, where the brave and much lamented Sir Isaac Brock met his death in the year 1812 :—he had hastily collected a few troops to oppose a sudden invasion of 1400 Americans under General Wadsworth, and was gallantly driving them from the village, when a fatal shot from a picked rifleman struck him down, and for a moment turned the fortune of the day : but a British reinforcement opportunely arriving, the affair terminated in the surrender of the American. General and 900 men—an honorable though scarcely adequate compensation for the loss of the British Commander. A monument marks the spot where the hero fell, which we, in common with every loyal subject, visited.

The evening of the day was fully occupied in surveying the Cataract. It is idle to attempt to describe the impression produced by the vast volume of falling waters and their concomitants of sound and spray—which latter, by the bye, Miss Fanny Kemble, or rather Mrs. Butler, has since so appropriately termed the “ everlasting incense of the waters.”

JUNE 1. After some altercation, we succeeded to day in purchasing an active little mare and light travelling waggon—the price originally demanded was 180 dollars, or £36. sterling; but, on the Yankee principle, the bargain was finally concluded for two thirds of the sum. There were several cleared farms on sale in the neighbourhood of the Falls, but at a price which climate, soil, and unrivalled scenery, combined to raise far beyond an adventurer's means.

JUNE 2. Proceeded to St. Catharine's, a village situated on the Welland canal, where the ultra American incivility of the innkeeper upset our philosophy, and might have got us into a broil, had not a gentleman of the village come to our assistance and offered us the hospitality of his own house ; he happened moreover to be a magistrate, and after due investigation declared his intention of depriving surly Boniface of his license.

Our next stage was Hamilton, a thriving little town at the head of lake Ontario. It was the fourth of June, the grand muster day of the Provincial militia, who were assembled in some force. They were certainly a parti-coloured and curiously equipped regiment, and at first

reminded us strongly of the “ brave army of valiant General Fusbos ;” but in truth the resemblance was only in externals, for they went through their evolutions in a manner which shewed that these citizen soldiers were not met to trifle with their duty ; and that, in the event of a new war, they would prove themselves as heretofore, able defenders of their king and country. We were told that they had neither forgotten nor forgiven the excesses committed on their frontier during the last American war, and that an implacable enmity existed between them and their Republican neighbours. Several farms were offered us there, and again at Ancaster and Brentford, a village deriving its name and interest from Brant, the celebrated war chief of the Mohawk Indians—there, on a rich and fertile tract, watered by the grand river, are located a remnant of the gallant and faithful “ Six Nations,” over whom the son of the old warrior rules in his father’s room : we were furnished with a letter to the chief, but unfortunately he was absent from the settlement ; we had however a lovely walk to the village, through a wood of young oaks, and lawns carpeted with flowers, reminding us strongly of our own dear country ;—as indeed the whole territory and its broad river is said to do the Indians of their old hereditary possessions on the beautiful Mohawk. Those of the tribes whom we met saluted us with much courtesy, and conversed with us in their quiet reserved manner : as we were returning, two of their young men passed us in fierce altercation, which quickly produced blows ; the struggle was severe for a few minutes, until one of them was thrown on the ground, where he lay so perfectly motionless, under the cruel kicks and blows of his adversary, that we thought him dead ; but the conqueror ceasing his chastisement on our approach, the fallen one jumped up, and sped away to the woods with the swiftness of a deer. Poor fellows ! they had both of them partaken too freely of the “ whiteman’s firewater,” or they would not thus have compromised their native dignity.

From Brantford our course lay to Oxford, about forty miles west. On this journey we were exposed for some hours to the fury of a thunder storm, which on this continent, where the elements, like nature, operate on a giant scale, is truly appalling. While the clouds were congregating, the wind lulled to a perfect calm, which we felt more oppressive and fearful than even the storm itself. The whole forest lay still as death, except that occasionally, and apparently without cause, a large dead limb parted from some neighbouring tree, and fell heavily to the ground. At length a few great drops of rain came pattering down, and then followed a gust of wind, rushing through the forest and bowing the mighty trees like reeds : of the rest I have but an indistinct notion, for self-preservation was the prevalent feeling, and I can only remember that we scarcely knew whether to fear—most the incessant lightning which involved us in flame, or the huge boughs which, borne on the fury of the storm, threatened us momentarily with annihilation ; somehow or other we did manage to continue our route, which was judged safer than to stop, and after an exposure of three hours had the happiness of reaching Oxford, half-dead indeed with cold and fright, and somewhat bruised, but on the whole right thankful to have escaped so well. On arriving at the door of the inn, we had bitter proof that we were in the land of independence :—no ready waiter answered our summons—no careful ostler appeared to take charge of our jaded steed— no bustling landlady, with anxious enquiries after our safety and condition ; but every thing silent as death : our plight did not admit of ceremony however, so on the faith of a written assurance over the door, that Captain ——, late of the U. S. Militia, and now of the “ Washington’s Head,” *did* profess to entertain travellers, we groped our way to the bar, where we found the redoubtable Captain occupying all the chairs in the apartment, (one of which supported his legs on a higher elevation than his head,) and smoking a cigar : after a cool survey of our persons, which he contrived to effect without moving himself, or removing his hat, he calculated that “ we must be tarnation wet, for it did rain almighty,” and then continued puffing away as composedly as before ; this we supposed was to impress “ us Englishers,” as he immediately discerned us to be, with a due notion of his independence; for when he saw that we neither blustered nor swore, he soon put aside his cigar and bestirred himself and his helps so effectually, that in much less time than appearances warranted, a huge fire was roaring in the stove,

eggs and bacon smoked upon the board, and we were comfortably established in dry clothes, solacing ourselves with a glass of hot whisky punch, and talking over the adventures of the day. The next morning a pleasant drive of five or six hours brought us to the riant shores of Lake Erie, where it was pronounced advisable to halt a day or two, to repair the damage done to our horse and vehicle by the late storm. Pork and eggs and dry bread, with perhaps a chance squirrel, or other "such small deer," having been our portion ever since we left Toronto, we hoped here to mend our fare, with the assistance of a gun and fishing rod ; a few pigeons however were the extent of my bag, during our halt ; and my companion succeeded scarcely better in beguiling some miserably small trout out of a distant stream, where a Yankee conducted him, under an assurance that "the trouts there were uncommon plenty, and beat all for eating."

During our necessary detention on the lake, we became acquainted with an English settler's family ; they were well connected in England, and had been long enough in the province to have mastered the "*Res angusta domi*," which originally drove them from home, and assembled about them several English comforts, and even refinements ; the lady, nevertheless, spoke feelingly of the privations and hardships she had endured in the first years of her exile : some of which, though softened by habit and bettered circumstances, still remained ; one grievance she particularly dwelt upon, was the difficulty of procuring respectable servants, unless she would consent to treat them as equals, and admit them to sit at table with her husband and children ; at the time of our visit, she was combining in her own person all the domestic offices, and I believe retired from the dining table to wash up the dishes and boil the tea kettle.

JUNE 14 . Visited Colonel Talbot, at his thriving settlement of St. Thomas. The gallant Colonel migrated from Ireland many years ago, to the extreme surprise of his friends, who deemed him mad. Skill and perseverance have, however, long since proved that there was "method in his madness," for his settlement is second to none in the Province, in situation and fertility, as well as in respectability. We met him returning in high spirits from attending a grievance meeting in the neighbourhood, which he and his friends had, by a series of counter resolutions, converted into a loyal and constitutional one. Report pronounces him very rich, but habit and taste have confirmed him in the simple mode of life of the Bush ; and if happiness consists in wanting but "little here below," he may be pronounced truly happy.

JUNE 23. This evening found us at London, on this side the Atlantic ; also, the capital of a very large and extended district : it too has its Thames,, a petty stream, with just water enough to turn a mill ; yet who knows but that one day it may have its own importance in this growing colony—" *et olim parvula Roma fuit ?* "

Here we got on Dundas street, a high road which traverses the Province from east to west ; and on it we made the best of our way back to Toronto, where we happily arrived again on the last day of June, after exactly a month's absence.

In our tour we had seen some striking scenery, which others before us have doubtless described ; and dwelt with admiration upon lakes and falls, and rivers and forests, which we had read of as in a fairy tale : we had also observed the condition and prospects of various classes of settlers, and traced the progress of civilization from the first hard-won encroachment upon the forest, to the cleared and highly cultivated farm ; we had visited also good sized towns, which a few years ago were insignificant hamlets, and beheld thriving villages rising among the blackened stumps of still undecayed trees. On the other hand, we had endured all the miseries which unmade roads, uncivil landlords, uncomfortable inns, and a salt pork diet, could accumulate on unfortunate travellers. Moreover, we had come off losers

by several ounces of blood in divers encounters with the mosquitoes, besides having been in sundry perils by flood and field.

The price of land we found averaged from 1600 to 2000 dollars for a lot of 200 acres, one fourth cleared and in cultivation : wild land might then be procured at five dollars an acre, but not very readily, as there was a general disinclination to sell among holders, owing to the rapid increase of monied settlers, and the general prosperity of the province under the fostering care of Sir J. Colborne, whose government will long be remembered by every class of colonists.

III.

Cholera at Toronto—Yonge Street—An acquaintance—Bad taste and impolicy of English settlers affecting Yankee idioms and habits—Contemplation—Visit to a Gentleman Farmer—Cobourg—Percy—River Trent—Seymour township—Rice Lake—Otanabee River—Peterboro—Misissiquas Indians—Missionaries—Return to Toronto.

At Toronto, we found the cholera raging so fiercely that all business was at a stand ; so we immediately resumed our seats in the waggon and set off down Yonge street, on an expedition to lake Simcoe. For some miles the farms on either side the street or *road* are well cultivated ; and here perhaps, of all places in the Province, ought the mere practical farmer to settle, as the proximity to the capital gives him a safe and steady market for his produce, and the means of obtaining in return many of the comforts of life. At an inn on the road side, I met with a young farmer who had lately emigrated from my own county in England ; he was altogether hopeless and desponding, a thing in itself by no means uncommon with settlers of his station in life during the first two or three years, their minds being generally too contracted to look far into the future, or to bear with patience present hardship, that good may come : but from what little I saw of my co-patriot, there was no room to hope that his prospects would brighten as time advanced ; for instead of business, he had evidently turned all his attention, since his arrival in the Province, to the study of Yankee manners and idioms, which, disagreeable as they are, he certainly contrived to render more offensive by his unmeant caricature ; cool impertinence he mistook for independence ; and a swaggering jaunty air for an easy manner ; of course he “ guessed and calculated ;” but to my inquiries respecting his prospects, and what information he had gained, and where he meant to settle, he was utterly unable to give a straight forward reply :—doubtless he will soon be a bankrupt here, as he probably has been already in England, where, if he has friends or credit left, he will return, “ seven times” more worthless than he came out. I do not know any thing more degrading than an affectation of Yankee airs and idioms in a newly-imported English settler ; whether yeoman, or, as I fear, sometimes (“ *proh pudor*” be it said), gentleman. The English emigrant, like the ancient Roman, should carry with him to the colony the manners, habits, and principles of the mother country ; he ought to glory in the title of *Englishman*, and esteem it as much a privilege as ever did Roman that of *Citizen* ; but too often the reverse is the case. The Anglo-Canadian copies the worst and most prominent features of the American character, and the British settler in his turn caricatures the copy. I have no quarrel with the manners of the real American, which are for the most part essentially good, inasmuch as they are civil, friendly, and obliging ; but they are peculiar, and there is certainly nothing in them for an Englishman to be enamoured of, much less to imitate. Policy also might teach us to avoid this error ; for England, and especially English settlers of the better class, may rest assured, that if they do not their utmost by precept and example to maintain the national character, and foster a love for British institutions in the colony, the growing amalgamation which this base imitation is producing between the States and the Province, will eventually unite them in other respects also ; and then, what will our domination be but a name, which the first opportunity will blot from the map ? At present, the hatred excited by the last war in

some degree checks the tendency to republicanism, but with the passing generation this will pass ; and then, if the present taste be encouraged, will come the startling question, *what else have we to trust to ?* No, if we would not realise the American boast that monarchy cannot thrive on the new Continent, let the English settler take pains to prove its real superiority to any other form of government; so that whenever, in the course of years, this thriving Colony is able to go alone, its constitution and form of Government may be modelled on those which have raised the mother country to her summit of glory.

JULY 2. Lunched at Newmarket, with the hospitable family of Mr. R., M.P.P., who gave us much useful information respecting Lake Simcoe and its environs. The neighbourhood of that lake is generally preferred by British officers, who are settled here in great numbers, though I confess I could not see any thing in the character of the country or climate very prepossessing ; nor did the reports I heard of it give me a more favourable opinion : there was indeed an idea in *contemplation* of connecting the giant lake Huron with the Ontario, by means of a canal passing through lake Simcoe and its adjuncts ; this of course would be a vast public benefit, and must prove of corresponding advantage to the settlers on the line ; but at best, the plan must take years to carry into execution, and meanwhile it is only among things *contemplated*. There is no word so tempting, and at the same time so fallacious in this country, as *contemplation* ; if you look at a farm with a view to purchase, you are told that something is in *contemplation* to make it the finest in the Province ; go where you will, *contemplation* is always busy ; it is the settler's *idol* ; and, like other idols, “ deceiveth those who put their trust in it.” In this neighbourhood we also passed an agreeable day with one of our fellow passengers in the New York packet ; he had been settled some years, and was possessed of a good frame house, a well cleared farm, and handsome property ; his summers were spent on his estate, and his winters at Toronto, or in friendly visits to his neighbours ; from one large field he had obtained, in the past year, forty five bushels of wheat to the acre. All that we saw in that settlement put us in high spirits ; which, however, were in some measure checked a few days afterwards, by the opinion of two intelligent gentlemen I met at the Lieutenant Governor's table at Toronto ; to the effect that it was impossible to realize any considerable property by farming in Canada, though an English gentleman of small capital and some experience might live in comfort, and bring up a family respectably. The latter is undoubtedly true, but the former statement must be received with limitation, though I noted it at the time out of deference to the authority it proceeded from.

JULY 9. On our return from lake Simcoe, we found the cholera still raging at Toronto, and his Excellency very busily employed in doing all that humanity and policy could suggest to arrest or mitigate the evil. By his recommendation, we again started on an expedition to Seymour, a then unsettled township of much reported promise on the river Trent. Our first halting place was Cobourg, a small but rapidly increasing town, situated on the lake, about midway between Toronto and Kingston. A stage passes through the town daily, and the steam boats always touch. It has also a post office, two bank agencies, several good stores and private houses, and is in many respects a desirable place to settle near. From hence to Percy on the Trent the road was execrable, though we were of course assured it was in *contemplation* to make it better ; and what was of more importance, to make navigable the Trent river, a full broad flowing stream, which would amply repay the expense ; indeed the project has been recommended to the Legislature by the Lieutenant Governor, and will doubtless receive their immediate consideration.

On leaving the growing village of Percy, we were quickly buried in the woods of Seymour Township : an entirely new settlement, if *settlement* it could be called, where nothing was *settled* ; the day was spent in wandering through the forest, and discoursing with our guide on the nature and quality of the land : we were not however tempted by what we saw ; and after passing an uncomfortable night in a wretched shanty, returned to Cobourg in order to visit

Rice Lake, and some of the Townships on the Otanabee river. An excellent road of fifteen miles in length leads from Cobourg to a tavern on Rice lake, whence a steam boat goes daily to Peterboro'. The lake itself has little to recommend it ; though a bright sun, and the gaily painted canoes of several Indians who followed in our tract, made the scene cheerful—they amused themselves and us with paddling close under our vessel's stern, and then floating away on the mimic waves in our wake. Occasionally, loud peals of laughter betokened their high satisfaction—a great breach, by the bye, of Indian decorum—but these people were of the Chippewa nation, a tribe lightly esteemed by their brethren of the Six nations.

Having crossed Rice Lake, we entered one of the channels of the Otanabee river—a deep clear stream flowing between thickly wooded low banks, up which our heavy barge made weary progress. The clearings were few ; and, judging from the appearance of the settlers we saw, most aguish and unhealthy. At Peterboro', a town of almost miraculous growth, we found a very comfortable though unfurnished inn, at which were several settlers from the neighbourhood, who freely furnished us with information about the different townships. At their suggestion, we crossed lake Chemong, about six miles from the town, to look at Harvey township ; but on landing from Buckhorn lake, we were fiercely assailed by a host of our ancient enemies, the mosquitoes, who in the end forced us to make a disorderly retreat to the boat.

Situated on Chemong lake, or, as the word signifies in the Indian language, the “ lake of canoes,” is a village belonging to the Chippewas, at that time little known to white men. We found the inhabitants very shy and reserved in their communications with us ; and two boys, whose good graces we endeavoured to purchase by the offer of brandy, uttered a loud shriek of horror at the sight of the *poison*, as they, perhaps rightly, called it, and fled away from us into the woods. Our guide told us that these Indians had been notorious drunkards, until their conversion to Christianity by the teaching of some Methodist missionaries ; but that now that vice, amongst many others, was completely eradicated.—It is pleasing to be able to bear this passing record to the success of these zealous men and their pious efforts. On the whole, we were well satisfied with what we saw and heard of the prospects of Peterboro' and the adjacent townships ; though, in obedience to a resolution made in England, I determined not to make any purchase until I had been some months in the country, and had had a fair opportunity of judging whether or not the life of a settler was likely to agree with my tastes and habits.

IV.

Sporting excursion to lake Erie—Long Point—Various wildfowl—Fish Hawk and Bald Eagle—Wild turkeys—Simple mode of taking—Slaughter of a buck—Return to Toronto—Detention at Cobourg—Canadian Inn—Second visit to Peterboro 1—Indian mode of lighting a fire—Purchase of an Estate—Fashionable season at Toronto—Close of year 1832.

AUGUST 3d. As the cholera was still raging in the capital, we determined to pay a second visit to the shores of lake Erie, and take up our abode for a few weeks in some farm house, where we might enjoy the sports of the field, and at the same time acquire a knowledge of the country mode of farming. At Long Point, a narrow strip of land running very far into the lake, a lodging was offered us, which appeared to combine both these advantages; so we accordingly moved into it just in time to commence our sports on the morning of the *twelfth*, when we knew that many of our friends at home would be engaged in the same manner on the moors. Our fare was to depend chiefly on our skill, for the house afforded little beyond stale bread, and veal dried to the consistency of old leather. But this was no great hardship, for the lake supplied us with fish of various kinds—the marshes with wild fowl and snipe—the cleared lands with quails—and the woods with partridges, wood-grouse, black squirrels, and

occasionally a turkey ; the summer duck we also frequently shot, not less delicate in flavour than in plumage : and sometimes, though not often, a wild swan ; these birds alone, of all the water tribe, we found as wild and shy on the lonely lake as when they visit our English shores. The shallows were tenanted by the patient spectre-like heron, whose silent watch we never used to disturb, for he seemed associated with thoughts and feelings of home, and we were glad to have, in the midst of all that was new, a memorial of old times and our old country. Of an evening, the scene was enlivened by the cry of

“ the Bittern, booming from the hollow fen,”

and of countless others of the varied tribes who dwell in the marshes or frequent the waters. There were the fish hawk, too, and his implacable enemy the bald eagle : we often sat on the shore watching them on a still evening :—the hawk would hang motionless in the air, or skim lazily along at a considerable height above the lake ;—then suddenly he would fold his wings, and foil with a heavy plunge into the water, from which he generally emerged with a noble fish in his talons, directing his flight to an old white cedar, his accustomed retreat.— Long before his journey was accomplished however, the eagle (who from the top of some tall pine had been an interested observer of his motions) bore down upon him with an exultant scream, and tore the quarry from his grasp : sometimes the hawk would not tamely yield his prey, but more frequently he declined the unequal contest, and retired cowed and sulky to the nearest covert.

One morning, a neighbouring farmer brought us an invitation to visit his clearing, and try our luck with a flock of wild turkeys, which were in the habit of committing depredations on his maize or Indian corn. We were very sanguine of success, and started immediately ; but all that we gained by a long watch and very fatiguing walk was the conviction that the wild turkey was not a bird to be shot by mere tyros ; in fact it is very difficult of approach, easily alarmed, and able to run with the swiftness of a deer ; sometimes, when pressed hard by a dog, he will take refuge in a tree, at the foot of which the dog is taught to yelp until the sportsman comes up, who shoots him while his attention is fixed on the enemy below.

Nevertheless the turkey is said to be a dull stupid bird, and is often taken in the following simple and wholesale manner : a small shanty or hut is built near their accustomed feeding place, with an opening in the side large enough to admit the birds, stooping ; in and about this place grain is carefully scattered, which the birds pick up without suspicion, stooping their heads and feeding until they find themselves in the trap, then they raise their heads and make great efforts to escape at the top and sides, and in every way, excepting that by which they entered. They have less brain in proportion to their size than any other bird, which may possibly account for their stupidity.

Another day, our farmer friend brought us tidings of some deer having been seen on his farm ; we immediately started in pursuit, and after several hours' chase came up with a couple ; they were feeding quietly, and apparently so unconscious of our approach, that I might have had a steady shot, had I not unadvisedly raised my hand to give my companion notice—a movement which, light as it was, awakened their attention, and off they started like lightning, followed, though of course ineffectually, by the contents of our rifles.

SEPT. 15. The maize or corn harvest was now general, and the weather oppressively hot ; nevertheless, the swallows have all disappeared within this day or two. One morning, while in pursuit of wild turkeys, a fine buck crossed our path ; each of us poured the contents of our barrels into his side, which he acknowledged by a mighty bound, and dashed away through the forest :—we followed instantly ; and at length, by the help of a couple of hounds, borrowed of a farmer, traced him down to the lake shore, where he was discovered deep in

the water, and fast bleeding to death :—he proved a noble fellow; fat, and in prime season, weighing upwards of 200lbs.—My companion also shot a wild turkey, so this was a proud day in our annals.

OCTOBER. The weather continued mild and open ; but as the days were shortening, and winter approaching, I determined to leave my companion, whose sporting ardour was still unabated, and return to Toronto, to see whether anything further remained to be done before the winter finally set in. On my arrival, several friends recommended me to visit more carefully one or two townships in the Newcastle district, which I willingly agreed to. A steam-boat conveyed me to Cobourg, on the last day of October, where a heavy fall of rain and snow detained me a couple of days. An inn in a village or small market town is but a dreary refuge on a wet day in England ; but on this side of the Atlantic, where the guest's time and habits are subject to fixed rules, it is almost insupportable. At half-past seven in the morning, a loud bell gave notice that all who intended to breakfast should bestir themselves immediately : at eight, a repetition of the summons was instantly responded to, by a general rush from all parts of the house and the neighbouring' stores ; for well the American, whether Yankee or Canadian, knows, that on these occasions

“ Né room for lated wight is found.”

Instantly the work of destruction commenced—plates rattled—cups and saucers flew about, and knives and forks found their way indifferently into their owners' mouths or the various dishes on the table :—there was little talking and less ceremony—“ I say Miss,” (to the lady in waiting) “ please some tea”—or, “ I say Mister,” (to me) “ some steak, I guess I likes it pretty rawish,” being the extent of both. The meal was composed of tea, coffee, toast, and bread, and the never-failing buck wheat cakes, with a variety of sweet-meats, crowned with a “ pièce de resistance,” in the shape of a huge greasy dish of beef steaks and onions.

The company was of a motley description, Yankees and emigrants, washed and unwashed, store-keepers, travellers, and farmers. At the top of the table, enveloped in sundry great coats, sat a large unshaved backwoods' settler, just dismounted from his waggon :—opposite to him, with his hat on, an amusing contrast—a little prim, puritanical, store-keeper, with well-brushed clothes, sleek countenance, and straight greasy hair. Ten minutes sufficed for the despatch of the meal ; after which, each and all retired in silence and haste as they had entered, stopping, however, as they passed the bar, for the never failing dram and cigar, which concludes the business.

At one o'clock, the same bell rang for dinner. The post of honour at this meal was occupied by our despotic host in person, who dealt out a “ Benjamin's mess” to each hungry expectant :—puddings and creams succeeded the substantiate, which were conveyed to the mouths of the different guests with frightful rapidity, on the blades of sharp dirty knives. I ventured to ask for a spoon, a request which only drew from “ Miss” a disdainful toss of the head, accompanied by the exclamation of “ my ! if the man be'ent wanting a spoon now !” There was no conversation ; and as soon as nature was satisfied, the dinner-bolters severally rose from table and quitted the room. Having no books, and being wearied with watching the dull rain, and the equally uninteresting motions of the prim, sleek little gentleman, in his store opposite, I applied to mine host for a book ; this extorted a murmur against the “ old country people,” who could not smoke their cigar in quiet ; but after a while he produced a volume of Johnson's Dictionary, and a “ History of the United States, by an American :” — he had somewhere besides a volume of Extracts from various English authors, published at Boston, under the imposing title of “ British Classics,” but this was not forthcoming. These books are the staple, I afterwards found, of most North American inns. The “ History of the United States, by an American,” it was clear, was published for American readers : indeed, it differed

so materially in its narrative of events from the commonly received version at home, that it strongly reminded me of the old fable of the “ Traveller, the Lion, and the group of Sculpture :”—nay, not unlikely, I thought, it might have formed the study of a certain learned lord at home, previous to his declared conviction, that “ history was an old almanac.” At length, six o’clock came, and with it a repetition of the morning meal :—there was no new feature in it ; and as soon as the weariness induced by a day of ennui gave hope of rest, I retired to bed.

In the morning, the sun shone bright, and as we crossed the tranquil lake, and ploughed heavily up the still, clear river, I could scarcely believe that we were fast approaching the close of a Canadian November. At Peterborough, I procured a guide and four boatmen to convey me to Verulam township. As we crossed Pigeon Lake, two Indians came up in a canoe, laden with a quantity of skins and other spoils of the chase, on which two noble hounds reclined. They offered to accompany us on our voyage of discovery, which I gladly agreed to, for my companions said they would prove in many ways a useful and agreeable addition to our party. One of them served as cook and fire-lighter ; which latter office he performed by scraping the inner bark of the white cedar, and rubbing it between the palms of his hands, until it was quite soft ; he then applied a bit of lighted tinder, and fanned it into a flame, which he fed with stripes of bark, and finally with large logs of cedar : all this was the work of a minute or two, and in less time than it takes to describe, we used to have a fire blazing, and a well-filled cauldron hanging over it. Thus attended, I took a careful survey of Verulam township, and finally decided on purchasing a lot of 3000 acres, as a first investment of capital. This resolution made, we sped merrily back across the Shallow lakes, to Peterboro’—then steamed down the dull Otanabee, and duller Rice lake, and reached Toronto in safety, a few days before Christmas.

My companion had arrived from lake Erie ; the last traces of cholera had disappeared, and the terror-stricken families of the town were generally returned from their different retreats in the country. The season, (for Toronto, like other capitals, has its season), was also now commencing, and halls, routs, and dinners, abounded ; thus engaged, with pleasure on one hand, and the business necessary to the completion of my purchase on the other, I found the year 1832 draw to a close, much better satisfied with the prospects before me than I had anticipated, and in a more easy and contented frame of mind than I could have deemed possible, so far from my family, my friends, and my own fireside.

Six years in the bush ; or, Extracts from the journal of a settler in Upper Canada, 1832-1838 (1838)

Author : Need, Thomas ; Moodie, Susanna, 1803-1885

Subject : Frontier and pioneer life ; Women pioneers

Publisher : London, Simpkin, Marshall

Year : 1838

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Google

Book from the collections of : New York Public Library

Collection : americanaNotes : Attributed to T. Need. Cf. Toronto. Public Libraries. A bibliography of Canadiana, no. 2195. Attributed also to S. S. Moodie. Cf. P. Gagnon. Essai de bibliographie canadienne, no. 3327.

Source : Internet Archive

<http://archive.org/details/sixyearsinbusho00moodgoog>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

February 25 2013