
LIFE IN THE WOODS.

“Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THAT must be a very pleasant life indeed, wherein no enemy shall appear who cannot be easily subdued by a strong arm and an axe. Yet it seems to have been an enemy no more potent which drove men from free life in the woods, to the shackles of a closer congregation. It is the fashion to speak of the woodland life, as savage, barbarous, and brutal; and of the housed life, either in feudal castle or trading city, as refined, polished, and elevated. It might not be altogether wasted time to inquire whether this conclusion stands upon a true foundation or not. So many errors pass current as truths, that one may be not illiberally induced to investigate such a question, though it be one that the stricter student will deem of minor morality. Of such small questions, much that is of mighty import is not unfrequently constructed.

That cosmogony which affirms for man the highest origin, represents him in his pristine creation as contravening his Creator's will, and in the very first generation, the very first vital act, as quarreling with, and murdering his brother. If this be literally true of the external man, as it is now undoubtedly a true signature of operations in the human soul, the first wigwam was probably erected more as a defence from the assaults of man against his

brother, than from the assaults of uncongenial weather. When peace reigns in every human bosom, the free man may wander for food and for repose to whatever latitude the season shall render propitious to his feelings and his wants. The thought of erecting a house grew not out of human necessity so much as out of human rapacity. The love of power in some assailant, rather than the love of art in some pacific being, forced on man the utility of a house for his protection, while in a state of repose. It at least defended him from too sudden a surprise, if it did not wholly protect him. The inclemency of a stronger brother, more than the inclemency of the weather, generated the thought of a stockade.

Passing over this consideration, let us contemplate the sylvan man in his native state, let us compare him with the civilian, and see to which the superiority must be awarded, both as respects nature and conditions. Behold, what it is difficult for us to imagine, an individual wholly free from the diseases consequent upon luxury and debauchery, and subject only to the little incidental ills of the exhilarating chase. Conceive of one to whom hereditary or chronic disease is unknown, to whom catarrh, and cough, and palsying apprehension of a cold never are disturbances. He walks erect, with elastic, almost bounding, step, expanded and uncovered chest, and limbs untrammelled by the ligatures of fashion. Health, strength, and agility, combined with an unchecked reliance on their continuance, are a living fund of joy, wonderfully contrasting with the disease, weakness, and imbecility of modern refinement.

Every sense in the primitive forester's frame is integrally preserved. He holds an immediate intercourse with nature herself, or at least by his unerring senses and the undeviating objects in nature, he is enabled intuitively to read off the living volume as it lies open and unpolluted before him. By mere sight and smell, he is at once inducted into a knowledge of the essential properties of plants, and can without experience, foretel their operations on the human system, as unerringly as the native sheep can select its suitable food, or the untamed wood-dove, can without schooling, essay a winged journey.

If *after* long labor and close study, the civic student knows something concerning nature from his books and

pictures, the sylvan student knows much of her and her laws *before* the record of book or graver was constructed. He is as a mother who knows of maternity, and a mother's feelings in a living and soul-participating manner, antecedent to all external observation, while the college student is comparable to the obstetric physician, who compiles a book from external observation only, and writes of feelings he never felt, and of experiences he never did or can experience.

The sylvan is present at the very fountain head, living in and with the works, productions, and operations which will, by and by, be recorded; the civilian is acquainted only with the record. The one is witness to the vital spring and birth of nature's offspring; the other's studies are comparable only to a poring over the parish register.

It is the boast of modern experimental philosophy, that it has abandoned or overturned the Aristotelian method of study by words, adopting that of studying things. But it pursues its objects by means of crucibles, retorts, and balances, as deceptive, vague, and unsatisfactory as the studies they have superseded; for these, after all, stood as near the moral source as modern science. Whereas the pure, unsophisticated human body, is a retort, a test, far surpassing all the instruments which the highest science can boast. By the sylvan man all nature is affectionately felt; by the civilized it is only intellectually scanned. The warmth of life is characteristic of one; the coldness of death the distinguishing mark of the other. Chymical science, the great boast and wonder worker of our enlightened age, cannot even discern those delicate differences and lineaments in nature, which optics can reveal, and it can do nothing in any department of nature, until the object is reduced to its mineral state. In the grand and noble field of life it is powerless. Vegetables and animals, as such, in their living beauty are fruitlessly presented to the chymist's skill. He has weights and measures, but cannot compute living motion any more than he can fathom moral emotion. He has testing apparatus, but no taste. But our natural chymist only sees and knows such objects in life and motion. With his unassisted eye, he perceives varieties which the chymist never learns, and by an unvitiated palate, he detects in the living volume of nature the

occult essential qualities of plants, which the last analysis in the laboratory rarely or never can reveal. The forms, odors, statures of plants, as they simply stand before him, are types in the boundless volume of which the scientific student seems ever destined to peruse merely the title page. The eye, the nose, the palate, the touch, and every sense is an inlet direct from the book of nature, a first impression, which to the civilized student rarely comes otherwise than at second hand. He must refer to his printed authority, and his human classification, his encyclopedia, his constructed circle of circumferential science; while our nature-student has in himself the authority, knows truly the real author, and feels himself to be at the centre of science, of which the circumference lies about him. "The unity of the Sciences," the last pleasing thought of labored skill, the key-stone with which studious industry has at length crowned its self-wondrous arch, is no novelty to the free soul. He never felt knowledge otherwise than as a unity; nature or natural objects never were thus dissectively presented to him. He sees objects analytically without doubt, as well as synthetically; but always perhaps under both aspects at once, always in their individual existence as well as united to an antecedent unity, the parent of them all.

For all the purposes of life, for all the utilities of his life, the science of the forest man is complete. All the wants which in such a life are generated, in the immediate world about him, find their supplies. The pressure of hunger, the needful clothing, even the ornaments which he desires, with their tasteful forms, and superadded tints, he obtains without difficulty or danger to himself or fellow man. Not so is it with the wants and wishes generated in civic life. These know no bounds, but expand with every gratification; their victims at once boasting over their expansion, and groaning over their denial. No sea or land is unexplored to create new wants, or to supply excited and extraneous appetites, and carrying with him to the innocent and pure, disease and vice of the cruellest kind, civilized man boasts the extension of his domain, the multiplication of his likeness.

A darker age presumes upon its false illumination, to call antecedent ages dark. A busy, wandering, restless

civilization ventures from the point of its own worthless activity, to pronounce the contented child of nature savage and barbarous. Literally, perhaps, these epithets are justly applied. If savage means a dweller in the wood, and barbarian one who does not denude his chin of hair; if the terms be taken to mean no more than these, there would be clearly no greater injustice or condemnation in them, than in calling one a civilian who dwells in a city. But the design in using these words is to affirm that the heights of mind, elevation of thought, purity in sentiment are denied to man in one condition of life, and granted in the other.

That those who are most ready to use these allusions aspersively ever think about the matter, or are capable of thinking very profoundly, may, until they feel more benignly, very charitably be doubted. But there is sufficient evidence on record to prove that the sublimest conceptions have not been withheld from the mind of the North American native, any more than from the highly taught sons of civilization. A narrative not unworthy of Swedenborg, or even of Plato, is reported in David Brainerd's Diary, kept while he was a missionary among the natives of New Jersey, about one hundred years ago. Of its correctness there is very little room to doubt; since the recorder mourns over it in every aspect, and that the seer could have acquired it from any other person, there is no ground whatever to suspect. It is given in these words:—

"What increases the aversion of the Indians to Christianity, is the influence their *pouwows* have upon them. These are supposed to have a power of foretelling future events, of recovering the sick, and of charming persons to death. And their *Spirit*, in its various operations, seems to be a Satanical imitation of the spirit of prophecy, that the church in early ages was favored with.

"I have labored to gain some acquaintance with this affair, and have for that end consulted the man mentioned in my journal of the 9th of May, who since his conversion to Christianity has endeavored to give me the best intelligence he could of this matter. But it seems to be such a mystery of iniquity, that I cannot well understand it, and so far as I can learn, he himself has not any clear notions of the thing, now his spirit of divination is gone from him. However, the manner in which he says he obtained this spirit, was, he was admitted into

the presence of a great man who informed him that he loved, pitied, and desired to do him good. It was not in this world that he saw the great man, but in a world above at a vast distance from this. The great man, he says, was clothed with the day; yea, with the brightest day he ever saw, a day of many years, yea of everlasting continuance! This whole world, he says, was drawn upon him, so that in him the earth and all things in it might be seen. I asked him if rocks, mountains, and seas were drawn upon, or appeared in him. He replied, that every thing that was beautiful and lovely in the earth was upon him, and might be seen by looking on him, as well as if one was on the earth to take a view of them there. By the side of the great man, he said, stood his shadow or spirit. This shadow, he says, was as lovely as the man himself, and filled all places, and was most agreeable as well as wonderful to him.

"Here, he says, he tarried some time, and was unspeakably entertained and delighted with a view of the great man, of his shadow or spirit, and of all things in him. And what is most of all astonishing, he imagined all this to have passed before he was born. He never had been, he says, in this world at that time. And what confirms him in the belief of this, is, that the great man told him he must come down to earth, be born of such a woman, meet with such and such things, and in particular, that he should once in his life be guilty of murder. At this he was displeased, and told the great man he would never murder. But the great man replied, 'I have said it, and it shall be so.' Which has accordingly happened. At this time, he says, the great man asked him what he would choose in life. He replied, first to be a hunter, and afterwards to be a powwow or diviner. Whereupon the great man told him he should have what he desired, and that his shadow should go along with him down to earth, and be with him forever. There were, he says, all this time no words spoken between them. The conference was not carried on by any human language, but they had a kind of mental intelligence of each other's thoughts. After this, he says, he saw the great man no more; but supposes he came down to earth to be born, but the spirit or shadow of the great man still attended him, and ever after continued to appear to him in dreams, and other ways, until he felt the power of God's word upon his heart, since which it has entirely left him.

"There were some times when this spirit came upon him in a special manner, and he was full of what he saw in the great man; and then, he says, he was all light, and not only light himself, but it was light all around him, so that he could see

through men, and know the thoughts of their hearts. These depths of Satan I leave to others to fathom, and do not know what ideas to affix to such terms, nor can guess what conceptions of things these creatures have at the times when they call themselves all light."—p. 204.

So similar are some of these sentiments, and so like are some of these words to those of Swedenborg and Wordsworth, that in the obscurity of time they might be attributed to these sources. But as our record is dated three fourths of a century before one, and many years before the other authority, such hypothesis is manifestly untenable; but the converse is rather to be maintained.

In a previous passage the zealous Brainerd remarks.

"I find that in antient times, before the coming of the white people, some supposed there were four invisible powers, who presided over the four corners of the earth. Others imagined the Sun to be the only deity, and that all things were made by him. Others at the same time having a confused notion of a certain body or fountain of deity, somewhat like the *anima mundi*; so frequently mentioned by the more learned antient heathens, diffusing itself to various animals, and even to inanimate things, making them the immediate authors of good to certain persons."

When we find so unwilling a witness bearing satisfactory testimony to the spontaneous generation of the most profound and subtle thoughts, which have ever entered the human soul, filling, in so vivid a manner, that of the unschooled savage, how can we deny the presence of that mental life and quickness, which as polished and civilized beings we delight to boast. To these red men, and to all the white who came into connection with them, the names and works and thoughts of Behmen the profound, or of Plato the elegant, were alike unknown. To these wilds their renown had not then travelled, and even now they are unpopular and obscure authors. Had it indeed been otherwise, and could it be proved that such sentiments were the results of outward lessons, it would prove no less satisfactorily to what subtlety of thought the native mind could ascend; even beyond that of the missionary teacher having St. John's mystic gospel in his hand. For I must not suppose that those whom I now address, like Brainerd, "cannot even guess what conceptions these creatures have

at the time they call themselves all light," seeing that we know there "is a true light, which lighteth every man who cometh into the world."

No wonder need be then excited in our minds, when we occasionally hear of the young spirit, to whom the costliest education has been afforded, and before whom the whole world invitingly lies as a beautiful unexplored garden, every path free to his foot, turning, after a little experience, his course from the city towards the woods. The experiment of a true wilderness life by a white person must, however, be very rare. He is not born for it; he is not natured for it. He lacks the essential qualities as well as the physical substance for such a life, and the notion of entering on it must be considered merely an interesting dream. Some amalgamation may, however, be possible; and to unite the advantages of the two modes has doubtless been the aim of many. Even now we hear of some individuals, on whom the world might hopefully rely to become eminent even amongst the worthy, betaking themselves from the busy haunts of men to a more select and secluded life.

But will they succeed in wrestling against their increased natural needs, and their remaining civic wants, diminished as these may be? On trial, as on due consideration, it will be found that this is not a very promising course. By the time the hut is built, the rudest furniture constructed, the wood chopped, the fire burning, the bread grown and prepared, the whole time will be exhausted, and no interval remain for comfortably clothing the body, for expansion in art, or for recreation by the book or pen. This but faintly promises to be the mode, by which the simple and pure in heart shall escape the pressures and burdens, which prevent the full and happy development of the soul.

Of those who have sought a recluse life on a religious basis, it has been remarked that solitude is a state suitable only to the best or the worst. The average cast of humanity cannot be much benefitted by it. It is not a condition in which human beings can be brought into the world, and it is rarely a condition in which they should attempt to remain in it. The austerities pertaining to silence and solitude may improve the very bad; they may leave uninjured the very good; but such as are in the

process of improvement, an association of some kind seems more suitable, as it is evidently more natural. It is natural, not only in the sense of harmony with the humane affections, which out of social intimacy must painfully wither, but also it is natural to the interior or spirit life. The highest virtue can be promoted by friendship and fellowship. If even God himself may have a favorite disciple upon whose bosom he can recline; the spiritually minded surely cannot commit a very great error in adopting the aid of co-support, when they are so fortunate as to find it, or still more fortunate to be able to bestow it.

No mistake could be more evident than that of assuming that the child of nature lives an isolate life. On the contrary, he moves in a circle much more social than modern cities can boast. The tribe is a better type of the universal family than the city, where the inhabitants of the same street are frequently unknown to each other after dwelling many years side by side. Again, so little of the love-destroying notion of property enters into this free man's scheme, that the universal idea is not erased. He is not an isolated but a dispersive being. He lives not alone; he merely occupies a large space. He does not estimate his strength, his value, or his happiness by the density of the population, but rather by its rarity. In the spare civic statistics of forty persons to the square mile, he is oppressed by the crowd. He requires abundant supplies of vital air, and the atmosphere is corrupted for him long before the white man's neighborhood arrives at a comfortable point. The pure oxygen which the Creator provides is suitable to the red man, while the white is only happy in steam, or some other self-generated atmosphere. By union of numbers, by condensation into a phalanx, the white man conquers the red, whom singly he could never subdue. By a new and superior phalanx, constructed altogether on a different basis, it is probably destined that the present civilized institutions shall be superseded, and the new and superior nature in man receive a new and superior development.

This is in fact the point to which all our endeavors must converge. Poetic wanderings will not more rectify us than trading conversations. And on calm consideration, unswayed by those paradoxes which ingenious men have from time to time constructed concerning the beauti-

ful liberty of the sylvan life, and to which imaginations we have on this occasion perhaps too strongly tended, have we not to confess that one is as distant from true life as the other? They both lie on the same circumference. They are but segments of one circle, struck by the compasses of human selfishness at too great a distance from the true centre. There does not appear to have been any true inward progress by the change from the woods to the town; if indeed men ever were so changed, and it be not the fact that these two lives belong to two distinct races, each severally fitted by organization for its respective mode of life; which seems the truer hypothesis.

Conceding civilization to be some *improvement* in social arrangements, while we assert that it secures no vital *progress* to the soul, we have to conclude that it is our business and our duty to look in some other, some new direction. It is evidently not by a new circumferential disposition of humanity, that it will be brought into new vital relations. The outward conditions may be more or less favorable to the placing of each individual soul in a position to receive the higher influences, and to live the higher life; but such conditions are scarcely within the scope of any scientific predictions. They seem to be in all cases as immediately within the hands of the highest source of good, as the good itself of which the human soul is by such conditions brought to be the recipient. Or, if there be any conditioning required, it is not to be sought in persons, events, or things without and about man, so much as *in* himself. The critical event in the career of any human soul, which shall open it to the highest consciousness, and subject it to the highest, and tenderest, and loveliest graces can never be foretold. The uninitiate spectator can scarcely believe the importance of the occasion when it is affirmed. Actions of the most ordinary kind, but performed by some particular person; events of apparently the lightest character, yet administered by providence through some delicate human relationship, often suffice to produce that sacred effect, which results from the feeling that every door of human sympathy is closed against us. It is in this sad hour; it is in such sacred mood of mind; that the holy flame descends upon the altar of the human bosom; after which the outward conditions of life

in very deed become a matter of light importance. Thenceforward riches or poverty, cities or woods, association or isolation or dispersion, nay even health and sickness dwindle into films and shadows, scarcely noticeable by the regenerate soul.

To view all things as male and female is a favorite habit of many acute minds; and to such it may appear, that the forest and civilized lives are the male and female, from whose marriage an offspring shall result more conducive to human bliss. But it is difficult to conceive how corrupt parents shall have pure progeny, until their own corruption be annulled. They are rather to be estimated both as males. And, as in the olden history, the tiller of the ground is again destined to destroy the keeper of sheep, the hunter of deer.

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