

THE STORY OF KING BIRCH.

A TALE OF KNOWLESVILLE CARLETON COUNTY.

"And what is so rare as a day in June?
Then if ever come perfect days,
Then Heaven tries the earth if it be in tune,
And over it softly her warm ear lays;
Whether we look or whether we listen,
We hear life murmur or see it glisten."

It was on one such glorious June day, a few weeks ago, that I sat myself down to rest on the summit of yonder tree-crowned hill. The seamed and gnarled branches of an ancient birch spread their cool canopy above me. Below, fields of young grain and rich green meadows sloped gradually down to the tiny stream that glistened in the sunshine like silver.

Far away to the right, a little hamlet nestled among verdant hills, crowned with forests and flanked by fields of wheat, hay and oats with here and there a darker strip of green which I supposed was potatoes. The summer sun smiled proudly down on that scene of peace and prosperity!

The leaves rustled drowsily and I nestled closer to the scarred trunk of that ancient birch, and rested my head on a bed of soft green moss that was doubtless infested with myriads of tiny insects, but I was weary and my eyes closed just as I began meditating on the many changes that a few years had wrought in that vicinity. Not long ago this extensive and varied scenery was covered with vast forest then unexplored by man, a great wilderness inhabited by lions, wolves and bears which wandered forth to seek their prey even at noonday. Great must have been the war waged against the smaller and more defenceless animals; but how much greater had been the conflict between man and the giant wilderness, the results of which might be traced in the cultivated fields, the clustered farm houses and the busy hum of human voices which came wafted up from the valley below.

Almost imperceptibly the rustling of the birch leaves had changed to a murmur resembling the indistinct accents of a human voice, and as I listened more attentively I could distinguish words. The giant birch, in a voice weak with age, told me his story thus: "Some forty years ago I was king of this vast region which you see stretched before you. The hills were crowned with birch, beech and maple. In the valleys stood hemlock, spruce, fir and a few pine trees. Of course we did not condescend to associate with these lowland trees but they were fairly good subjects on the whole, though a trifle impertinent. In winter when our branches were moaning and creaking in the frosty air, one of the pines would tauntingly inquire if we weren't rather chilly, saying how comfortable he felt in his thick green coat. Usually his remarks were quite as sharp as the needles with which he was clothed. But in summer when they were sweltering in their thick winter garments, we rustled our cool leaves and though they spoke no word, we knew from their sullen countenances they envied our fresh light dresses. So our days went on for the most part peacefully."

"One day the quiet monotony of our lives was interrupted. To the southwest of us, about a mile away, we saw a thin blue column ascending. This we afterwards learned to call smoke. Of course we were all anxious to learn more of this strange appearance as none of us could guess its cause. Chancing to glance one evening soon after in the same direction I was startled to behold quite a space of cleared ground. My first thought was for my subjects who had but lately occupied that place; now they were gone but I knew not how or where. Near the centre of this space of open ground stood an oblong shaped structure of a dull brown color, and something which looked like smoke seemed to be curling from the top of it, but it was too dark to be seen distinctly so I decided to wait until morning before continuing my investigations."

"These changes must have taken place within the last few days but we had been so busy discussing the smoke (you see trees like to gossip too) that we hadn't noticed anything around us."

"Next morning at sunrise I was wide awake, but, though my eyesight was keen in those days, I could distinguish little more than on the previous night. But the mystery was soon to be explained. My friend, the south wind, came rushing along and I caught him in my branches and questioned him concerning the strange proceedings to the southwest. He had only a moment to stay, said he had promised some rain for the spring beauties and must hurry on. However he told us the brown oblong structure was called a camp and was made of overlapped sheets of spruce bark nailed to a four-cornered frame which was formed of the trees that had been cut down. He also informed us that the builders of the camp were called men. He had seen thousands of them during his travels, but to us, at that time, they were an entirely new creation, and it may be imagined with what interest we watched their proceedings."

"Soon the warm rains and balmy days of spring opened the portals of the waiting buds and we were rejoicing with our mother earth that the season of gladness had returned. Meanwhile the clearing to the southwest grew larger and larger. Soon the land was plowed and seed sown in hope of harvest."

"The owner of this clearing, Mr. Cyril Doucette, was a native of Nova Scotia who, desiring to lead a pioneer life, had penetrated thus far into the woody wilderness of New Brunswick. A man of French descent, medium stature, swarthy complexion, swayed by a spirit of fearlessness and courage, such was the first settler in my domain."

"In June another clearing was begun. This was much nearer than the first, just on the opposite side of the little brook yonder. Day by day our friends fell and the clearing broadened. At first we bitterly mourned the loss of our friends but time, the soother of all sorrows, taught us that we could be of great use to man and after a time we became reconciled to our lot."

"One chilly evening soon after this, the north wind, while passing, told us that Mr. Crawford was making a clearing a short distance to the north of us. Both he and Mr. Hemphill who owned the clearing nearest us, had come from Richmond, one of the southern parishes of the county."

"The chopping in both these clearings went on for two or three summers, then buildings were erected in the clearing across the brook and when these were completed William Hemphill and his young wife settled down to dwell with us."

"Some time before this a rude track or road had been made from Glassville. The constructing of this took several weeks and considerable labor but it was finally accomplished though it was very rough and uneven."

"About this time we noticed some settlers going southward to what is now Golden Ridge. These were Mr. Thorne and his family. Shortly after this a number of rough, rugged looking fellows, made their way in the same direction. We soon found out they were Americans who, not wishing to engage in the war that was then going on, fled from their country. They were called 'Skeddaddlers' and the settlement they made bore the name of 'Skeddaddle Ridge' long after the war was over and they returned to their own country."

"Quite a settlement had sprung up, by this time, where you behold yonder hamlet to the South West. It was named Knowlesville after Mr. Chas Knowles, one of the earliest inhabitants, and this settlement being to the east was called East Knowlesville, the name which it still bears."

"A road connecting Argyle and Skeddaddle Ridge had been cut, running at right angles to the Knowlesville road. In the year 1867 Mr. Currie settled about half a mile to the south of this junction of the two roads and Mr. Shay began clearing a farm a little north of the same corner. Mr. Whitehouse came in from Knowlesville and began to work his farm about this time too, so you see the space of a few years had sufficed to change this stretch of pathless forest to a pioneer settlement with a rich and prosperous future. As the days go by civilization encroaches more and more on my domains and robs me of my subjects and friends. Perhaps in a few years I too, shall fall under the sturdy stroke of the woodsman, and my body shall be severed from these stout old limbs which have protected it so long." Here the tree heaved a mighty sigh before continuing its narrative.

"In the year 1877 a Post Office was established at Skeddaddle Ridge and the name was changed to Golden Ridge, a very pretty name and one that seems very appropriate when you observe its harvest fields."

"In the next seven years the progress of the colony was marked by the increase and extent of its clearings and the improvement of its roads and bridges. During those early years, prosperous though they were, the settlers had very many hardships to contend with of which their descendants little dream. About this time the people began to talk of building a school house. Before this the children had attended either the Knowlesville or the Argyle school. A public meeting was held in which it was decided to build a school house at the junction of the two roads and in the summer of 1884 the building was completed. It still stands yonder and the children of the present day learn within its walls life's early lessons. During the summer and early autumn Sabbath school was held there and shortly after New Years, school began under the management of Miss Jennie King. The teachers since employed there are: Miss Freeze, Miss Underhill, Mrs. Brittain, Mr. House, Mrs. Laskie, Mr. Walton, Miss Sewell, Miss Emily Graham, Mrs. Gilmore, Miss Re Carpenter and Miss Parent. "During these last sixteen years clearings and cultivation have spread and I and my kingdom have according diminished. Ah, woe is me that I should behold this desolation and destruction of my proud domain! Of all my throng of subjects, behold only the faithful few are left to stand around my throne!"

Presently in a deep thrilling voice, pathetic from its very resignation he repeated:

"We will be patient and assuage the feeling

We may not wholly stay,

By silence sanctifying not concealing

The grief that must have away."

The rustling ceased and the silence seemed oppressive. Suddenly I seemed to be falling from a high cliff down, down, down and just as I reached the bottom of the gorge I awoke to find myself still at the foot of the giant birch with my head resting on the mossy ground. The sun had set but the west was still brilliant with crimson and gold and here and there a fleecy cloudlet floated contrasting its delicate tints with the flaming glory which surrounded it. Soon two twinkling stars appeared in the east, and being thus warned of the lateness of the hour, I hurried down the hillside among the deepening shadows. Once I paused and looked back at the ancient birch, he was standing grim and motionless, faintly outlined against the dusky background of the more distant trees, which swayed by the night breeze, ever and anon, bent their stately heads in reverent homage to their sovereign. Since then I have often visited King Birch, hoping to get further information, but all in vain for he seems engulfed in melancholy and takes no notice of outward things. Today as my gaze wandered from his majestic form to the surrounding country, I felt that he had bestowed upon us a goodly inheritance and I sincerely hope that we may all prove ourselves worthy of the land thus intrusted to our care. G. F. P.

Insurance Against Appendicitis.

(American Medicine.)

Insurance against appendicitis has been undertaken by the Royal Exchange Assurance Company of England, which will issue policies at the rate of \$1.25 a year for every \$5.00. The holder is guaranteed all the medical, surgical and nursing expenses up to the amount insured. In commenting upon this impolite policy, the Lancet wonders how the applicant can answer to the question, "Have you or any of your family ever suffered from appendicitis or from any of the symptoms pertaining to it?" What is meant by "family" and is a pain in the belly a symptom of this disease only? Moreover, has the patient the requisite medical knowledge either of himself or his family to give discriminating answer? The insurance company's leaflet says that during 1900 15,000 operations were performed in the United



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Kingdom for appendicitis. Were there so many in the whole world? The company estimates that about one in 400 per annum will be attacked by the disease. But would the rate be the same in the United States, with its appendiceal belief, as in conservative England? And then how about all the other ailments and accidents which may happen to one? There are a thousand ways in which one might be sick or die; should not the prudent man secure a policy for each of them? This would in time result in a distinct form of monomania, a morbofobia which might be called insurance disease. Could the company devise a policy for these poor afflicted ones?

A Modest Request.

The wit of the Irish is proverbial, and instances are not wanting to show that they have all their wits about them in time of danger. An Irish switchman employed in the freight yards of a Western city was unlucky enough one day to get his left foot fastened in that death trap known as a "frog." A vigorous effort to free himself failed: A fright train was backing down upon him, not more than forty feet away.

Quick as thought he whipped his knife out of his pocket, opened it, cut the folds of his shoestring with one sweep of the blade, jerked his foot out of the shoe, leaving the latter in the frog, and jumped to one side. He escaped death by a margin of less than a second.

The freight agent hearing of his narrow escape, called him into his office the next day.

"Larry," he said, "you showed wonderful presence of mind in an emergency yesterday. I should like to do something for you to show my appreciation of it. What shall it be?"

"Well, sir," responded Larry, scratching his head, "the shoe is as good as iver, but string's no good at all now. Ye might give me an order for a new pair of shoestrings, sir."

A husband said to his wife: "I dreamed last night that I caught a man running away with you."

"What did you say?" she asked.

"I wanted to know what he was running for," replied the husband.

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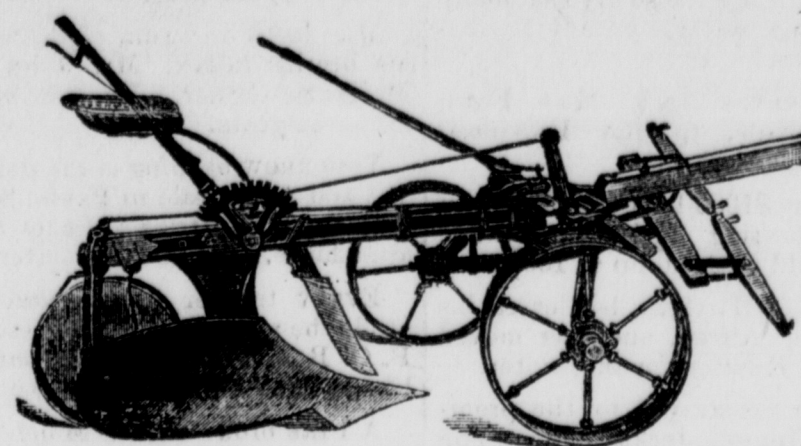
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