

LITERATURE, &c.

FROM AUDUBON'S ORNITHOLOGICAL BIOGRAPHY.

THE PRAIRIE.

On my return from the Upper Mississippi, I found myself obliged to cross one of the wide prairies, which, in that portion of the United States, vary the appearance of the country. The weather was fine, all around me was as fresh and blooming as if it had just issued from the bosom of nature. My knapsack, my gun, and my dog, were all I had for baggage and company. But, although well moccasined, I moved slowly along, attracted by the brilliancy of the flowers, and the gambols of the fawns around their dams, to all appearance as thoughtless of danger as I felt myself.

My march was of long duration; I saw the sun sinking beneath the horizon long before I could perceive any appearance of woodland, and nothing in the shape of man had I met with that day. The track which I followed was only an old Indian trace, and as darkness over-shadowed the prairie, I felt some desire to reach at least a copse, in which I might lie down to rest. The night-hawks were skimming over and around me, attracted by the buzzing wings of the beetles which form their food, and the distant howling of wolves gave me some hope that I should soon arrive at the skirts of some woodland.

I did so, and almost at the same instant a fire-light attracted my eye. I moved towards it, full of confidence that it proceeded from the camp of some wandering Indians. I was mistaken—I discovered by its glare that it was from the hearth of a small log cabin, and that a tall figure passed and repassed between it and me, as if busily engaged in household arrangements.

I reached the spot, and presenting myself at the door, asked the tall figure, which proved to be a woman, if I might take shelter under her roof for the night. Her voice was gruff, and her attire negligently thrown about her. She answered in the affirmative. I walked in, took a wooden stool, and quietly seated myself by the fire. The next object that attracted my notice was a finely formed young Indian, resting his head between his hands, with his elbows on his knees. A long bow rested against the log wall near him, while a quantity of arrows and two or three racoon skins lay at his feet. He moved not; he apparently breathed not. Accustomed to the habits of the Indians, and knowing that they pay little attention to the approach of civilized strangers, (a circumstance which in some countries is considered as evincing the apathy of their character,) I addressed him in French, a language not unfrequently partially known to the people in that neighbourhood. He raised his head, pointed to one of his eyes with his finger, and gave me a significant glance with the other. His face was covered with blood. The fact was, that an hour before this, as he was in the act of discharging an arrow at a racoon in the top of a tree, the arrow had split upon the cord, and sprung back with such violence into his right eye as to destroy it for ever.

Feeling hungry, I enquired what sort of fare I might expect. Such a thing as a bed was not to be seen, but many large untanned bear and buffalo hides lay piled in a corner. I drew a fine time-piece from my breast, and told the woman that it was late, and that I was fatigued. She had espied my watch, the richness of which seemed to operate upon her feelings with electric quickness. She told me that there was plenty of venison and jerked buffalo meat, and that on removing the ashes I should find a cake. But my watch had struck her fancy, and her curiosity had to be gratified by an immediate sight of it. I took off the gold chain that secured it from around my neck, and presented it to her. She was all ecstacy, spoke of its beauty, asked me its value, and put the chain round her brawny neck, saying how happy the possession of such a watch would make her. Thoughtless, and, as I fancied myself, in so retired a spot, secure, I paid little attention to her talk or her movements. I helped my dog to a good supper of venison, and was not long in satisfying the demands of my own appetite.

The Indian rose from his seat, as if in extreme suffering. He passed and repassed me several times, and once pinched me on the side so violently, that the pain nearly brought forth an exclamation of anger. I looked at him. His eye met mine; but his look was so forbidding, that it struck a chill into the more nervous part of my system. He again seated himself, drew his butcher-knife from its greasy scabbard, examined its edge, as I would do that of a razor suspected dull, replaced it, and again taking his tomahawk from his back, filled the pipe of it with tobacco, and sent me expressive glances whenever our hostess chanced to have her back towards us.

Never till that moment had my senses been awakened to the danger which I now suspected to be about me. I returned glance for glance to my companion, and rested well assured that, whatever enemies I might have, he was not of their number.

I asked the woman for my watch, wound it up, and under pretence of wishing to see how the weather might probably be on the morrow, took up my gun, and walked out of the cabin. I slipped a ball into each barrel, scraped the edges of my flints, renewed the primings, and returned to the hut, gave a favourable account of my observations. I took a few bear-skins, made a pallet of them, and calling my faithful dog to my side, lay down, with my gun close to my body, and in a few minutes was, to all appearance, fast asleep.

A short time had elapsed, when some voices were heard, and from the corner of my eyes I saw two athletic youths making their entrance, bearing a dead stag on a pole. They disposed of their burden, and asking for whisky, helped themselves freely to it. Observing me and the wounded Indian, they asked who I was, and why the devil that rascal (meaning the Indian, who, they knew, understood not a word of English) was in the house. The mother—for so she proved to be, bade them speak less loudly, made mention of my watch, and took them to a corner, where a conversation took place, the purport of which it required little shrewdness in me to guess. I tapped my dog gently. He moved his tail, and with indescribable pleasure I saw his fine eye alternately fixed on me and raised towards the trio in the corner. I felt that he perceived danger in my situation. The Indian exchanged a last glance with me.

The lads had eaten and drunk themselves into such condition; that I already looked upon them as *HOMES DE COMBAT*; and the frequent visits of the whisky bottle to the ugly mouth of their dam,

I hoped would soon reduce her to a like state. Judge of my astonishment, reader, when I saw this incarnate fiend take a large carving-knife, and go to the grindstone to wet its edge. I saw her pour the water on the turning machine, and watched her working away with the dangerous instrument, until the cold sweat covered every part of my body, in spite of my determination to defend myself to the last. Her task finished, she walked to her reeling sons, and said, 'There, that'll soon settle him! Boys, kill you—', and then for the watch.

I turned, cocked my gunlocks silently, touched my faithful companion, and lay ready to start up and shoot the first who might attempt my life. The moment was fast approaching, and that night might have been my last in this world, had not Providence made preparations for my rescue. All was ready. The infernal bag was advancing slowly, probably contemplating the best way of dispatching me, whilst her sons should be engaged with the Indian. I was several times on the eve of rising, and shooting her on the spot;—but she was not to be punished thus. The door was suddenly opened, and there entered two stout travellers, each with a long rifle on his shoulder. I bounded up on my feet, and making them most heartily welcome, told them how well it was for me that they should have arrived at that moment. The tale was told in a minute. The drunken sons were secured, and the woman, in spite of her defence and vociferations, shared the same fate. The Indian fairly danced with joy, and gave us to understand that, as he could not sleep for pain, he would watch over us. You may suppose we slept much less than we talked. The two strangers gave me an account of their once having been themselves in a somewhat similar situation. Day came, fair and rosy, and with it the punishment of our captives.

They were now quite sobered. Their feet were unbound, but their arms were still securely tied. We marched them into the woods off the road, and having used them as Regulators were wont to use such delinquents, we set fire to the cabin, gave all the skins and implements to the young Indian warrior, and proceeded, well pleased, towards the settlements.

During upwards of twenty-five years, when my wanderings extended to all parts of our country, this was the only time at which my life was in danger from my fellow-creatures. Indeed, so little risk do travellers run in the United States, that no one born there ever dreams of any to be encountered on the road; and I can only account for this occurrence by supposing that the inhabitants of the cabin were not Americans.

FROM THE LONDON LITERARY GAZETTE.

SOCIETY.

SOCIETY—how oft that word profaned

We find, in scenes where nothing social dwells!

Where cumbers mix, but sever'd hearts abound,

Each meanly cover'd with a mask of smiles.

But when a nature, noble in itself

And gifted, from the throne of greatness falls

Amid the mass, to sacrifice the soul

Round petty altars which the world has rear'd,

Who does not mourn a prostituted mind?

There was a festival where fairy shapes

Of bright-eyed women and of courtly men

Convened, and one to whom my fancy knelt

In sympathetic, high, and lonely hours,

Was there, supreme above the glowing throng.

His boyhood was a fiery thirst of fame

Which manhood had fulfill'd; and oh, how oft

The page of beauty where his thoughts had burn'd,

And all the verdure of his soul array'd

Each word with life and freshness—fill'd my mind

With ecstasy, till e'en this outward world

A hue of glory from his heart deriv'd!

Love, Truth, and Joy, each varied scene and sound

From him a mystic inspiration caught,

Where'er I went, some intellectual gleam

Or radiance told of his abiding power—

For he had clothed the universe with light

To me, and everywhere his presence ruled.

And oft in secret had I shaped the form

That shrouded a spirit such as I adored.

We met; and never on the cheek of life

Has death a with'ring change so quickly set,

As on my heart fell disappointment's blight!

Society had marr'd his noble mind;

His thoughts were muffled in unmeaning words;

The stately nothingness of gaudy life

Alone he worship'd; not a tint remain'd

Of his true nature; not a tone reveal'd

The lofty music of the soul within.

A thing of artifice, and wooing smiles,

And fawning speeches, rank with falsehood's breath,

Was all he proved, whom wonder had array'd

With attributes of glory!—sceldom pass'd

From light to darkness such a soul as his!

O World! and is it thus thy victims fall!

Then grant me, Heaven, some few confiding hearts!

Where truth abounds, and deep affections dwell:

The stern may laugh, or wisdom call it vain;

But life is holy when the heart is free!

ROBERT MONTGOMERY.

THE CITY OF ANTWERP.—Cities have as characteristic features as men. For instance, on landing as our travellers did, at Antwerp, they must have felt not only that they had entered another country, but another age of the world; every thing speaks of the foregone. The lower windows of many of the noblest houses are yet barred with strong iron gratings, as if tumult and riot, accompanied with political partnership were yet necessary to be guarded against. You are reminded everywhere, not of the palaces of princes, but of princely merchants, 'ledger men,' whose 'ventures' brought home wealth from all quarters of the globe. There is a pomp and circumstance about every thing that recalls those times when its merchants had their coffers of gold, their heaped up piles of rich silk—when they were obliged to hoard their accumulated wealth in 'ropes of pearls.'

Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts—

Infinite riches in a little space—

when individuals, as the present writer mentions, could throw into the fire bonds for two millions of ducats, when their kingly debtor condescended to dine with them. Every thing about Antwerp recalls those ages; and, as the people are accustomed to be much in the open air, sitting in parties of half a dozen before their doors in the open streets, there is always, towards evening, a great deal of noise and confusion; and, what with the seeming wealth, and the seeming riot, every unusual occurrence suggests a night brawl; you expect to hear the town bell summoning the burghers, and to see the city assembling its wisdom in council, while men in suits of velvet, stiff with its own richness, as suits of armour, are heading the brown bills of the city guard. All the cities of the Netherlands have something of this character; but only at Antwerp is the illusion perfect. Bruges is full of religious suggestions—and runs back to convents and cloisters, nuns, and friars, 'black, white, and gray;' you expect to be mangled, or suffer 'blessed myrterdom,' for spitting in a puddle which turns out to be a holy water font. Ghent is less uniform in its appearance: every where there is some reality of yesterday that breaks in upon the imagination; but at Antwerp, unless you seek for it, there is not a house, a street, or a stone that is not mellowed down with past centuries, or does not recall the age when its citizens rivalled princes in the splendour of their habitations and feasting, and exceeded them in wealth.—*Athenæum*

POISONING THE SICK AT JAFFA.—I must here say a few words on an odious imputation made long since against Gen. Bonaparte.—I mean, the pretended poisoning the soldiers sick of the plague. It is so contrary to truth that General Bonaparte proposed to poison the unfortunate men, that M. Larry, first surgeon to the army, never ceased to pronounce it an atrocious calumny; and he several times, in the last fifteen years, pressed M. Desgenettes to declare publicly with him the fact through the medium of the press. The latter, having been ill used by the king's government, recoiled, probably, at the thought of a declaration which might make his situation still more painful. It is, besides, impossible to name any person to whom the proposal should have been made. Finally, the calumny was spread by the English while they were in Egypt, and propagated by a writing of Sir Robert Wilson, who was then extremely young, and who, in maturer age, has openly declared that he had been mistaken.—*Mémoires de Levallée*.

ANECDOTE OF THE YOUTH OF NAPOLEON.—The manifestations of an impatient and dissatisfied spirit were almost of daily occurrence in the language and actions of young Bonaparte. Perhaps nothing in the *Memoirs of the Duchess of Abrantes* more strikingly exhibits the character of his mind than the following account:—The writer relates that she was accompanying her father from St. Cyr, where he had been to see his sister, then at school in a convent, and that something had but just occurred to put the young man entirely out of temper. "When they had got upon the coach, Napoleon burst into all manner of invectives against the detestable administration that governed St. Cyr, but particularly the Military Schools. My uncle, who was rather warm, felt displeased at the bold and bitter