

OUR WOOD LOT IN WINTER.

Our wood lot! Yes, we have arrived at the dignity of owning a wood lot, and for us simple folk there is something invigorating in the thought. To OWN even a small spot of our dear old mother earth hath in it a relish of something stimulating to human nature. To own a meadow, with all its thousand-fold fringes of grasses, its broidery of monthly flowers, and its outriders of birds, and bees, and gold-winged insects--this is something that establishes one's heart. To own a clover patch or a buckwheat field is like possessing a self-moving manufactory for perfumes and sweetness; but a wood lot, rustling with dignified old trees--it makes a man rise in his own esteem; he might take off his hat to himself at the moment of acquisition.

We do not marvel that the land-acquiring passion becomes a mania among our farmers, and particularly we do not wonder at a passion for wood land. That wide, deep chasm of conscious self-poverty and emptiness which lies at the bottom of every human heart, making men crave property as something to add to one's own bareness, and to ballast one's own specific levity, is sooner filled by land than any thing else.

Your hoary New England farmer walks over his acres with a grim satisfaction. He sets his foot down with a hard stamp; here is reality. No moonshine bank stock! no swindling railroads! Here is his bank, and there is no defaulter here. All is true, solid, and

satisfactory; he seems anchored to this life by it. So Pope, with fine tact, makes the old miser, making his will on his death bed, after parting with every thing, die, clinging to the possession of his land. He disposes with many a groan of this and that house, and this and that stock and security; but at last the manor is proposed to him.

"The manor! hold!" he cried,
"Not that; I cannot part with that!"--and died!

In such terms we discoursed yesterday, Herr Professor and myself, while jogging along in an old-fashioned chaise to inspect a few acres of wood lot, the acquisition of which had let us, with great freshness, into these reflections.

Does any fair lady shiver at the idea of a drive to the woods on the first of February? Let me assure her that in the coldest season Nature never wants her ornaments full worth looking at.

See here, for instance--let us stop the old chaise, and get out a minute to look at this brook--one of our last summer's pets. What is he doing this winter? Let us at least say, "How do you do?" to him. Ah, here he is! and he and Jack Frost together have been turning the little gap in the old stone wall, through which he leaped down to the road, into a little grotto of Antiparos. Some old rough rails and boards that dropped over it are sheathed in plates of transparent silver. The trunks of the black alders are mailed with crystal; and the witch-hazel, and yellow

osiers fringing its sedgy borders, are likewise shining through their glossy covering. Around every stem that rises from the water is a glittering ring of ice. The tags of the alder and the red berries of last summer's wild roses glitter now like a lady's pendant. As for the brook, he is wide awake and joyful; and where the roof of sheet ice breaks away, you can see his yellow-brown waters rattling and gurgling among the stones as briskly as they did last July. Down he springs! over the glossy-coated stone wall, throwing new sparkles into the fairy grotto around him; and widening daily from melting snows, and such other godsend, he goes chattering off under yonder mossy stone bridge, and we lose sight of him. It might be fancy, but it seemed that our watery friend tipped us a cheery wink as he passed, saying, "Fine weather, sir and madam; nice times these; and in April you'll find us all right; the flowers are making up their finery for the next season; there's to be a splendid display in a month or two."

Then the cloud lights of a wintry sky have a clear purity and brilliancy that no other months can rival. The rose tints, and the shading of rose tint into gold, the flossy, filmy accumulation of illuminated vapor that drifts across the sky in a January afternoon, are beauties far exceeding those of summer.

Neither are trees, as seen in winter, destitute of their own peculiar beauty. If it be a gorgeous study in summer time to watch the play of their abundant leafage, we still may thank winter for laying bare before us the grand and beautiful anatomy of the tree, with all its interlacing

network of boughs, knotted on each twig with the buds of next year's promise. The fleecy and rosy clouds look all the more beautiful through the dark lace veil of yonder magnificent elms; and the down-drooping drapery of yonder willow hath its own grace of outline as it sweeps the bare snows. And these comical old apple trees, why, in summer they look like so many plump, green cushions, one as much like another as possible; but under the revealing light of winter every characteristic twist and jerk stands disclosed.

One might moralize on this--how affliction, which strips us of all ornaments and accessories, and brings us down to the permanent and solid wood of our nature, develops such wide differences in people who before seemed not much distinct.

But here! our pony's feet are now clinking on the icy path under the shadow of the white pines of "our wood lot." The path runs in a deep hollow, and on either hand rise slopes dark and sheltered with the fragrant white pine. White pines are favorites with us for many good reasons. We love their balsamic breath, the long, slender needles of their leaves, and, above all, the constant sibylline whisperings that never cease among their branches. In summer the ground beneath them is paved with a soft and cleanly matting of their last year's leaves; and then their talking seems to be of coolness ever dwelling far up in their fringy, waving hollows. And now, in winter time, we find the same smooth floor; for the heavy curtains above shut out the snow, and the same voices above whisper of shelter and quiet. "You are welcome," they say;

"the north wind is gone to sleep; we are rocking him in our cradles. Sit down and be quiet from the cold." At the feet of these slumberous old pines we find many of our last summer's friends looking as good as new. The small, round-leafed partridgeberry weaves its viny mat, and lays out its scarlet fruit; and here are blackberry vines with leaves still green, though with a bluish tint, not unlike what invades mortal noses in such weather. Here, too, are the bright, varnished leaves of the Indian pine, and the vines of feathery green of which our Christmas garlands are made; and here, undaunted, though frozen to the very heart this cold day, is many another leafy thing which we met last summer rejoicing each in its own peculiar flower. What names they have received from scientific god-fathers at the botanic fount we know not; we have always known them by fairy nicknames of our own--the pet names of endearment which lie between Nature's children and us in her domestic circle.

There is something peculiarly sweet to us about a certain mystical dreaminess and obscurity in these wild wood tribes, which we never wish to have brought out into the daylight of absolute knowledge. Every one of them was a self-discovered treasure of our childhood, as much our own as if God had made it on purpose and presented it; and it was ever a part of the joy to think we had found something that no one else knew, and so musing on them, we gave them names in our heart.

We search about amid the sere, yellow skeletons of last summer's ferns, if haply winter have forgotten one green leaf for our home vase--in vain

we rake, freezing our fingers through our fur gloves--there is not one. An icicle has pierced every heart; and there are no fern leaves except those miniature ones which each plant is holding in its heart, to be sent up in next summer's hour of joy. But here are mosses--tufts of all sorts; the white, crisp and crumbling, fair as winter frostwork; and here the feathery green of which French milliners make moss rose buds; and here the cup-moss--these we gather with some care, frozen as they are to the wintry earth.

Now, stumbling up this ridge, we come to a little patch of hemlocks, spreading out their green wings, and making, in the ravine, a deep shelter, where many a fresh springing thing is standing, and where we gain much for our home vases. These pines are motherly creatures. One can think how it must rejoice the heart of a partridge or a rabbit to come from the dry, whistling sweep of a deciduous forest under the home-like shadow of their branches. "As for the stork, the fir trees are her house," says the Hebrew poet; and our fir trees, this winter, give shelter to much small game. Often, on the light-fallen snow, I meet their little footprints. They have a naive, helpless, innocent appearance, these little tracks, that softens my heart like a child's footprint. Not one of them is forgotten of our Father; and therefore I remember them kindly.

And now, with cold toes and fingers, and arms full of leafy treasures, we plod our way back to the chaise. A pleasant song is in my ears from this old wood lot--it speaks of green and cheerful patience in life's

hard weather. Not a scowling, sullen endurance, not a despairing, hand-dropping resignation, but a heart cheerfulness that holds on to every leaf, and twig, and flower, and bravely smiles and keeps green when frozen to the very heart, knowing that the winter is but for a season, and that the sunshine and bird singings shall return, and the last year's dry flower stalk give place to the risen, glorified flower.