

## NIGHT-PLAINTS.

BY HECTOR A. STUART.

Rosy-tinted veering,  
Sunlight disappearing  
Glides adown the cloud-enshadowed plane,  
O'er the landscape beaming  
With a milder gleaming,  
Ere his eyelids close in slumber's chain.

Bowed in pensive feeling—  
Memories o'er me stealing—  
Now the dew-spent glebe I sadly tread;  
Listen to the moaning  
Of the ocean droning,  
Droning endless anthems for the dead.

And the mango swaying,  
Rustling leaflets playing,  
Vocal breathes a spirit-soothing strain,  
Like the tone that lingers  
When, with elfin fingers,  
Zephyr strikes the lyric strings amain.

Vanished phantoms waking,  
From their caskets breaking,  
Mournful in each sad vibration steal,  
Bearing many a token,  
Many an idol broken,  
Many a vision from the shades of leal.

Wakens shadows looming  
Ghastful through the gloaming,  
Bearing many a mournful thought to me;  
Shades of memories rising,  
Dismal dreams devising—  
Dreams methought entombed eternally.

And amid their number,  
From death-stricken slumber,  
Rises one ill-fated memory;  
One enchanting vision,  
Like a dream elysian,  
Vainly buried in oblivion's sea.

Vision of a maiden  
With distress o'er-shaden,  
Tombed beneath the hollow-chanting roar  
Of the sea-waves bounding,  
Samoa's Isle surrounding—  
Breaking on the coral-studded shore.

Visions of a maiden  
With sea-weed o'er-shaden,  
Wraith-like, rising from her watery tomb;  
Lustrous brightness o'er her,  
Like a fair aurora  
Light disporting through my grief-oppressing gloom!

## THE BREECH-LOADER IN THE BACKWOODS.

The spring set in with its usual severity. Although sleighs had disappeared from the streets of Montreal, and I had actually seen a few precocious parasols abroad in the afternoon sun—although skating was over, and fur caps had been laid away in their summer bed of pepper-corns and camphor—the temperature was anything but vernal. The roads were impassable to any known vehicle, and offered the best evidence of the prevailing weather. Here they were muddy out of compliment to yesterday's rain; there they were dry out of civility to last night's frost, and dusty in honour of to-day's east wind; whilst elsewhere they pertinaciously kept some icy patches in remembrance of the past winter. Not a snowdrop or violet (as in England) peeped above the tree-roots, to tell of Nature's awakening from her six months' sleep. The fields were brown and bare, but in the corners of the fences the snow still stood at bay, or sank into the ditches to pine away unseen. Despite the almanack it was still winter, and, if it had not been for the evidence of my morning paper which fixed this day as 15th April, 1867, I could never have guessed the fact either by my own sensations or by looking out of the window.

In the Canadian spring the clerk of the weather appears to be puzzled with the amount of moisture he has on hand, and to expedite matters, he gets rid of it in rain, hail, sleet, and snow, all at the same time. Your window-panes are coated with ice, and you can only make out a blurred bird's-eye view of umbrellas, like erratic mushrooms, hurrying along the street below, and billiards become a necessity of your existence. Then the snow falls all night long like thistledown, and in the morning the fir trees in the garden droop with their feathery covering like plumes upon a maiden's hearse, and glisten with a myriad jewel-sparks in the early sun, when there is no breath to stir the slightest flake, and not a bird to shake down a tiny avalanche in this fairy-land. Then comes a week of storms varied by a day or two of dust, which nature sends to provoke the appetite for to-morrow's rain; then a hot day when you go out (by your wife's orders) in your thickest clothes; and a cold sleet when you first leave off your winter under shirts of such variety is Montreal spring!

But about the 15th April, more or less, the ice in the St. Lawrence breaks up, and the river shore is crowded every day with those who have nothing better to do than stand and stare at the ice, and bet drinks about a probable "shove." Now, being an idle man myself, I went every

morning to look at the river from the day when the first movement in the ice was visible. But it did not fall to my lot to see anything happen, for what slight shove there was this year took place (according to custom) during the night, and I saw two small boys gallantly plant a pocket handkerchief and broomstick on its summit the next morning. After the ice moves the river looks like a dissected puzzle badly put together. Heaps of refuse that have been growing all the winter near shore, and whose position you know perfectly well, are floating out in mid-stream, and the old road across the river (which you can identify as a ribbon of dirt), has half of its length up and down stream, leading from nowhere to nowhere—the other half in disconnected fragments, and one sturdy piece still pointing in the right direction, but terminating abruptly in open water. The stream is at work. And the scene is ever changing. Lanes of water are constantly opening out where a moment before there had been a jam of heavy ice, and the shore end of your old friend the road, having become detached in the *mêlée*, is swung lazily half across the river, where it grinds its edges against its better-half, and then in trying to elbow its way down the current, runs aground on the wharf half a mile below its starting place. In front of the city the water seems to rejoice in its freedom, and rushes wildly along the quays over the sunken wharves, crushing and rolling in its course lumps of dirty honey-combed ice that look sadly in need of this violent washing, while the boys of the neighbourhood, armed with bits of plank, are poking at the loose ice, and thereby promoting every possible collision, when they are not more pleasantly excited by inspecting the dragging the carcasses of dead horses from the water, which is accomplished after infinite labour and strange oaths to the admiration of the river-side loafers. Towards the canal the sound of hammering is unceasing, for there is but a fortnight before the 1st May, when the navigation will recommence, and when swarms of steamers and tugboats will be fussing and bellowing about the harbour. Seagoing captains, who appear to hibernate during the winter months, sun themselves at the tavern doors, and a fresh smell of rope and flavour of ship-chandlery is prevalent, and all this time the noble river is eddying onward, and the open water grows daily larger, and there is no longer any charm in my daily walk along the quays.

So thought I one day as I was turning homeward, when I run against my dear friend Jack Glimmer, who had come to town for the day from the Fort at Isle-aux-Noix. "When was I coming to stay with him?" he asked, and that was always the first question of his hospitable catechism. Well, there was nothing to do just then in Montreal, so I settled to leave town by the afternoon train of the 17th April, and spend two or three days with him in the remote swamps of the Richelieu.

The Grand Trunk Railway is unquestionably unsafe although it incurs no danger by excessive speed. It is slow, but it is not sure. It dawdles, but it goes off the track, and behaves itself altogether in an irritating and scandalous manner. Accidents are, as it were, part of the programme, and the time-table is a polite fiction, having only the negative merit of informing the public at what hours trains do not arrive. However, I had but thirty miles to St. John's, where the redoubted Jack was to meet me, and it was not unreasonable to hope for my ultimate arrival.

The American railway carriages are at the same time the hottest and the most draughty in the world. The doors at the east-end are banged continually, your fellow passengers are of the most unsavoury class, and from the moment you start you have annoyances innumerable. Nobody seems to care whether the train is in time or not. Nobody writes their grievances to the papers. Accidents are passed over as trifles, unworthy of record. Because Canada is a free country, forsooth!

For anybody to be amenable to any rules is incompatible with the transatlantic idea of freedom—a word which is thus interpreted, viz., that everybody is at liberty to do "as he darn pleases." Actuated by this notion, the conductor was perfectly indifferent to my remonstrance as to our snail's-pace of travel. Being in a hurry, I asked, "Might I get out, and walk?" But he simply nipped a hole in my ticket, and passed on.

At St. John's, Jack met me, and, by his direction, I there purchased another ticket for Stottsville, and was hustled into a single carriage on a branch line before I knew what I was doing. Stottsville I had never heard of. But Jack told me as we sat smoking in the carriage-van (where I selected the softest portmanteau as a lounge) that it was not more than two pipes off, or, to measure with greater accuracy, about eight miles.

In due time we were deposited in company with sundry beer-barrels at a shed, which with a small ticket-office on the other side of the line, and two or three shanties near the railway crossing, comprises the village of Stottsville. The only public conveyance, the mail-cart, was in attendance, and we availed ourselves of this means of transport for the three miles between the station and St. Valentine, where we were to meet the garrison boat from the Fort. Imagine a wooden tray on four wheels with two moveable seats, that were being continually jolted out of their proper position, drawn by two horses of the most unequal size, and with harness that held together in defiance of all mechanical principles—picture to yourself a driver (with a wooden leg) most indefatigable in his endeavour to provoke the team into an intermittent trot

and you may have some faint idea of our journey in the mail-cart. As for the road, it would take me as long to describe, as to mend it. Road, it was not; let me rather call it a portion of land railed off for traffic. At St. Valentine, we pulled up at the Post-office, but no knocking, or kicking at the door, no rattling at the window met with answer. So the mail-bag was thrown on the doorstep and left. I suppose, however, there are few of the natives of this out-of-the-way village that indulge in correspondence at all. Hence the arrival of the mail does not excite the slightest enthusiasm. The villagers are too busy with their nets, to trouble their heads about book-learning. *A propos* to this rustic stupidity, one such pupil, on being sent to school, was introduced to the alphabet. "What is that letter?" asked the teacher, who, seeing a big sturdy boy, thought he might get a satisfactory answer to a rudimentary question. "Don't know," said the boy. "Well that's A," exclaimed the teacher. "Oh! that's A, it is?" repeated the boy. "Now what letter is that?" asked the teacher pointing to B. "Don't know." "Well, that's B. You must remember B." "Oh! that is B, is it?" said the boy, without a ray of intelligence. "Now what letter is that?" asked the teacher, going back to letter A, as a test of his scholar's attention, a query which only elicited the same answer, "Don't know." "Where were you brought up?" said the teacher in despair. But the boy, who was too ignorant to be alive to his deficiencies, corrected his master by replying, "Guess I wasn't brought up nowhere. I come down in a raft!"

It was freezing sharp and was nearly dark when we stepped into the boat, manned by four soldiers, and were pulled across the broad stream of Richelieu to Isle-aux-Noix (though why "aux-noix," I am at a loss to imagine). Here I found a nice little old-fashioned fort, with bastions, ditch, and drawbridge—an important place in 1812, but in A.D. 1867, of no celebrity whatever, except from its being an oasis of civilization in the backwoods, and the darling aversion of the British subaltern. There my breech-loader was deposited on the store floor of the mess-room, and I was requested by the officers of the garrison (three in number) to make myself at home, which I did accordingly.

Here, if we were not like *Æneas*, filled with old wine and fat venison, we were made excessively welcome to ration beef and Montreal ale, followed by an interlude of mulled claret, which was in its turn, succeeded by whist and "white eye." And in the meantime, Jack had not been idle. Wishing to show me what sport really was, he had talked over the matter with a knowing corporal (who having a gun of his own and a punt, was looked up to as the authority of the island); and was determined that we should start at three a.m. next morning—Jack and myself in one boat, and the corporal in his own punt, to show the way. *Nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit*. I believed in Jack. I confess my weakness now, but Jack's gaiters impressed me, and whenever he pulled out his handkerchief, he started a shower of gun-wadding from his pocket, which had an appearance of business that I could not resist. Powder-flasks were lying about his dressing-table, a newly painted decoy was sitting on his chest of drawers, his hair-brushes were full of caps, and all the paraphernalia of a bird-stuffer were littering his room. In fact, there was every outward and visible sign that the island was a grand place for sport. Jack certainly was evasive on cross-examination, but confident, and so I went to sleep.

The corporal knocked me up before three a.m., and the full moon was staring me straight in the face through the little square window, as I shook myself into my knickerbockers, and shivered downstairs, where I found Jack filling his shot-belt, and eating sandwiches. It was bitterly cold, but I had put on a thick woollen jersey over my flannel shirt, and supplemented my Norfolk jacket by another of blanket cloth, which gave me a great advantage over Jack, who could not be persuaded to cover the intensely sporting appearance of his cream-coloured cord shooting jacket. We were afloat before the gold had faded from the moon, and I plied a pair of sculls up stream, while Jack impeded our progress as much as possible by an energetic but misguided manœuvring of a paddle, till the corporal hailed us, and pointed out what was called "a blind" for us to hide in, at the upper end of a small island. Here five decoys were put out, and we pushed the skiff behind the twisted twigs and roots, which were supposed to keep us invisible, while Jack informed me how he and the corporal had killed sixteen duck last week from that same spot. It is astonishing what sport Jack always had "last week," and what an unlucky fellow he is on all occasions established by evidence!

But the dawn broke upon us; the duck were on the move, and the peculiar whistling flight of the golden-eye was as music in Jack's ear, and I still believed in him. Now poor Jack, as I have said in a former paper, in short sighted, and (as he will not, under any persuasion, wear spectacles, even in a duck punt) labours under extraordinary difficulties. He is at perpetual war with his eyeglass, which gets entangled with the surrounding twigs, or flies with a jerk behind his back, or twists its string round the hammers of his gun. As soon as it falls from his eye (which happens at every crisis) it gets into mischief somewhere—drops perhaps on a sandwich and retains some particle of grease or mustard, which Jack has to wipe off, at all hazards, when the duck are flying well.

The sun shone out at last, but with a perplexing blaze of light, that make Jack miss his three first shots. The birds were very wild, and

our hiding place was not satisfactory. Besides Jack would go on talking, and would not sit still, but kept on drumming his boots on the bottom-boards of the boat, and shifted his gun every five minutes to enable himself to sit on his fingers for warmth. Then he would whistle to the marsh blackbirds, and take out his watch to see (as he said) how many more hours' penance he had to get through before breakfast. However, he did knock over a shaldrake, and killed a duck that I had winged. For my own part, I bagged three "golden-eyes," and a hawk in five hours, and had no other chance of distinguishing myself; whereupon Jack was perfectly miserable at my not having come down to him last week, and apologised profusely as we paddled back to breakfast.

The life of a British Subaltern in this frontier fort is that of a *Lotos-eater*. He seldom goes out shooting, at which fact, after my local experience, I ceased to wonder. He keeps that amusement for guests, and deludes his friends by visionary sport into sharing his solitude, whilst, for his own part, he is content to pass his time (with intervals of infinitesimal duty) in a dreamy state of repose, lounging about the stone corridors, or resting his limbs, if not on "beds of asphodel," on the best substitute manufactured by military outfitters. So it was, that Jack and I were left to our own devices and were allowed to go out again that afternoon to the South River (where Jack said sport was beyond question), without anyone volunteering to be of the party.

As Jack very properly observed, I had come for shooting: and shoot I should, if there was a feather above water, and within range. The boat was accordingly provisioned for a long afternoon, and we started, down stream this time—a hot sun tanning us to the complexion of Red Indians, and Jack scanning the horizon with his eye-glass, till we turned up the muddy South River, where, as a first instalment to our bag, Jack and I, between us, killed a gull. A mile or so up the river we put down our decoys, in a spot established by last week's success, and waited the result. I impressed upon Jack the necessity of silence, and he actually followed my advice for three quarters of an hour. But now that he was quiet, he might just as well have been talking, for not a bird was stirring, except an occasional crow cawing high over the woods, or a gull lazily flapping on the glassy water, out of shot. It was no day for shooting—for nature seemed surprised by the heat into taking siesta, the decoys were mirrored on the stream, and there was not a ripple to break the reflection of the leafless trees. In fact, it was tiresome: and, after a long hour, I passed the word for luncheon, to which we devoted ourselves fitfully during the remainder of the afternoon. Three hours passed, and not a shot! then came a fourth hour of waiting, in which the sport exactly equalled that of the previous three!—a fifth hour with a like result (or rather want of result) was not to be contemplated; so we pushed out into the open, and took up two purse nets which we came across. But there seemed to be as little going on under water as there was above, for we found only a few small perch and a big catfish, which we by no means coveted. In self-defence, we then began to shoot blackbirds for their feathers, which, though of no use to the fly-fisher, are very pretty for girls' hats. This gave us considerable diversion in piloting our skiff through the bush, where the river had overflowed, and in bailing out the boat, for Jack was continually overbalancing himself, and subsiding on the gunwale, to the great discomfort of his elbow. And thus we each blazed away some five pounds of shot before dark, to the great disappointment of our friends at the fort, who, hearing such a continuous fusillade in their neighborhood, had begun to believe that there was good shooting after all.

On our return we found the messroom crowded with more guns and a rifle or two. Three more innocents had been beguiled into the backwoods, and we had quite a merry party that night. Now, Jack still persisted that I must go out again the next morning at daylight, and I agreed to do so. The rest of the party were talking about their plans for the morrow, when I left the last four at whist, and lay down for a couple of hours' sleep, from which I was rudely awakened by the card-players, who, with guns in their hand and decoys slung on their shoulders, told me it was time to get up. This I did, and the party remained with me till I was dressed, when they left me to look after Jack, as he said. It then occurred to me to look at my watch. It was only two o'clock! and I then saw how I had been sold; which fact the laughing and noise downstairs might have established without any direct evidence. However, I made the best of it, and turned in again, boots and all, till I was called legitimately by Jack, who had his laugh at me too, for he, in his dreamy state, had been sufficiently wide-awake to salute the pseudo-sportsmen with a volley of boots.

Whilst the parties to this sell were snoring peacefully, we were again in our old "blind" at the end of the island. "Just the morning for us!" said Jack, for it was beginning to blow great guns. The twigs and stakes that composed our hiding place were being gradually washed away, and our decoys were at one moment hidden in the troughs of the waves, and the next appearing bottom uppermost, as if they gave up all attempt at deception till a more fitting opportunity. The elements conspired against us, and we were literally blown home again, with one solitary buffhead in the boat. Jack did not attempt to persuade me to try again, but, changing his tactics suddenly, and taking leave to come back with me to Montreal,