

THE OULD DRAGON;

OR, A VISIT TO THE BEAVER MEADOW.

BY J. W. DEBBAR MOODIE.

It is delightful to observe a feeling of contentment under the most adverse circumstances: and though we can hardly repress a smile at the rude attempts of the isolated Backwoodsman to obtain something like comfort, still we cannot help enjoying the buoyant spirits of the light hearted Irishman, who can make himself happy where all others would be miserable. A certain degree of dissatisfaction with our present circumstances is necessary to stimulate us to exertion, and thus to secure future comfort:—but where the delusive prospect of future happiness appears too remote to encourage any reasonable hope of ultimate attainment—then, surely, it is true wisdom to make the most of the present, and to cultivate a spirit of happy contentment with the lot assigned to us by Providence. “Ould Simpson,” or the “Ould Dragoon,” as he was generally called, was a good sample of this happy character: and we shall proceed to give the reader a sketch of his history, and a description of his establishment. He was one of that unfortunate class of discharged soldiers who had been tempted to sell their pensions far below their true value, for the sake of getting a lot of land in some remote settlement where it was worth nothing, and where they would have the unenviable privilege of expending the last remains of their strength in clearing a patch of land for the benefit of some grasping storekeeper, who had given them credit while engaged in the work. He had fixed his abode on the verge of an extensive Beaver Meadow, which was considered a sort of natural curiosity in the neighbourhood; and where he managed, by cutting the long rank grass in the summer time, to support several cows which afforded his chief subsistence. He had also managed, with the assistance of his devoted partner Judy, to clear a few acres of poor rocky land, on the sloping margin of the level Meadow, which he planted year after year with potatoes. Scattered over this small clearing, here and there, might be seen the but end of some half burnt hemlock tree, which had escaped the general combustion of the log heaps, and now formed a striking con-

trast with the white limestone rocks which showed themselves above the surface of the ground. “The Ould Dragoon” seemed moreover to have some taste for the picturesque, and by way of ornament, no doubt, had left sundry tall pines and hemlocks neatly girdled to destroy the foliage, the shade of which would be detrimental to the quality of the “blessed prairie” underneath:—and which, like martyrs at the stake, stretched their naked branches imploringly to the smiling heavens, from the rude clearing. As “Ould Simpson” was a kind of hermit, from choice, and far removed from other settlers, whose assistance is so necessary in new settlements, he was compelled to resort to the most extraordinary contrivances, while clearing his land, and after felling the trees, instead of chopping them into lengths, for the purpose of facilitating the operation of piling them previous to burning, which would have cost him too much labour, he resorted to the practice of “niggering,” as it is called: which is simply laying light pieces of round timber across the trunks of the trees and setting fire to them at the point of contact: by which means the trees are slowly burned through. It was while busily engaged in this interesting operation, that I first became acquainted with the “Ould Dragoon.” After treading my way among the uncouth logs which covered the blackened ground, and which were all smoking under the “niggering” process, I encountered the old man attired in an old hood of his wife Judy’s, with his canvas trousers rolled up to his knees, one foot bare, and the other furnished with an old boot that had seen better days. His person was long and sinewy, and there was a light springiness and elasticity in his step which would have suited a younger man, as he stepped along with a long thin log over his shoulder. He was singing a stave from the “Inniskillen Dragoon,” when I came up with him—

“With his silver mounted pistols and his long ear
bino gun,
Long life to the brave Inniskillen Dragoon.”