

THE OLD INDIAN

By ARTHUR S. BOURINOT

We walked one morning in the long ago
To see the ancient Indian's camping-place
Where he had spent so many summer days
In quietness, companioned by the trees
And blue lake water lapping wooded shores,
And dreams of deeds and prowess in the past.
The path we took meandered forest aisles,
Long vistas vanishing in traceried green,
Winding across a fairy-trodden glade
Where wild, red roses bloomed for our delight
And stalwart grew a gnarled old apple tree.
We loitered through sunned meadows million-flowered,
To pick the golden-rod or watch a hawk
Wheeling across the sky with sleepy wing,
Seeing the wild hare feeding furtive-eyed
Vanish amid the fern-leaved undergrowth.

We found the Indian stretched upon the plank
Serving as bed and only resting-place,
While o'er his head the overturned canoe
Fashioned the roof and shelter from the rain.
Wizened and gaunt he was and poorly clad,
With weather-beaten face whose dignity
Was deepened by the length of lonely years
And solitude in the blue Laurentian hills.
Well I remember how your joyousness
And eager, shy, expectant wonderment
Recalled to those dim eyes remote, dim days,
The glory, the sweet perishable gleam
That whiten with warm magic all the past;
And how your soft voice reassured his heart,
Emboldening him to speak of old exploits,
The times he lured the fish with lighted torch
And speared them in the shadow-haunted streams,
Or trailed the restless caribou far north
Amid a wilderness of mighty breadth
Where Manitou for immemorial years
Held sway upon the silent mountain tops.
And last he spoke of summer idleness,
When those long, langorous, indolent hours
Passed leisurely as some deep-laden barge
Floats seaward down a sluggish, oozing stream.
We took our leave, followed the homeward path,
But often after came to hear the tales
He told with guttural voice, in monotone,
Until the summer winged her southward way
And autumn in tan mantle red inwrought,
Wrapped round the hills her vivid, gorgeous folds.
To-day your letter tells me he is gone
To join the company of braves and chiefs
Who held the land before our forbears came.
And so I wrote these lines commemorative
Of that momentous morning long ago.