

THE MYSTERIOUS LAKE.

A SOUTHERN SKETCH: FROM THE NOTE-BOOK OF A CLERGYMAN:

NUMBER TWO.

SOME time ago, when I sent you Mr. EDITOR an account of that mysterious spring, THE WAKULLAH, I promised as you will remember farther particulars of this wonderful land in which my lot is cast. In performance of that promise I think of nothing which will interest you more than our near neighbor LAKE JACKSON, which I shall prove to be as self-willed and unreasonable a body of water for a lake as the Whigs fancy they have proved its illustrious namesake to have been as a president and a man.

Three years ago it was a beautiful sheet of water, extending north and south a distance of about seven miles, and varying in width from one to two. Its shores were uneven; sometimes rising abruptly to the height of forty or fifty feet, and sometimes running in a gentle slope from the water's edge to a considerable distance; but always they were beautiful. The sturdy live oak was there, casting its branches out with perfect *abandon*; looking as brave and free as the noble ship itself of which it some day will form a part. The grand magnolia was there, the monarch of the southern grove, to which the oak succumbs as the stout and serviceable yeoman bends to his slight but handsome and accomplished lord. These with the countless other trees which this climate produces, tied together with festoons of wild vines, and draped with long gray moss, made its shores a resort for all who loved the beautiful in nature. Nor was art entirely wanting. At an early period after the occupation of the country the neighboring planters, availing themselves of the many beautiful situations which its banks presented, built their houses on the high bluffs that overlooked the lake, and cultivated the grounds in falling gardens down to the water's edge. Two at least of these establishments would in all respects compare favorably with many in older countries; and in hospitality and good cheer they are certainly no where to be surpassed.

You have perceived that in all this description I have been speaking in the *past tense*; and you will ask, 'Why adopt this mode of telling your story?' You shall hear.

Two years ago the dwellers on the lake were startled to observe a strong current setting from all directions toward one or two particular spots. The waters were all greatly agitated, and strong eddies were observed to be working where the currents met. The level of the water rapidly subsided several feet, then suddenly remained stationary for a few hours, and then fell again as the same mysterious currents set in afresh from every side. This continued until the whole lake, with the exception of a few deep places here and there, was drained; and the poor fishes and other swimming and crawling things that 'do busi-

ness in great waters' lay floundering in the mud, at the mercy of animals of the other element, chiefly men and hogs. But there were many who went there not for fish but to find out what had produced so great a revolution. This they easily discovered. The strong currents had ploughed broad furrows in the sand, and following them they found their termination in deep chasms and crevices in the rocky bottom of the lake, but which were too narrow and irregular to be satisfactorily examined.

Here then was the explanation: tired of the sunlight and glitter of this upper world, it had broken the crust and inundated Symmes's hole; or weary of the name it bore on earth, or disgusted with the injustice its namesake encountered among men, it had gone down to Radamanthus and to Minos for their opinion.

I was not there at the time, and cannot say for certain. It was some months after the event that I found time to ride out with one who once was a bold dragoon, but who now sleeps, alas! where he can never again hear his bugle's call. A merry ride we had; but sad am I, poor G —! to think even of its joyousness, when I remember all that has happened to thee since.

But for the ride. The Captain mounted on a vicious little black, and I upon a powerful and well-conditioned roan; and followed by a couple of attendants, we started for the runaway lake. Our intentions were chiefly scientific; but to be ready for every emergency we each of us shouldered a double-barrelled fowling-piece heavily loaded with buckshot, and had plenty more of the *matériel* stuffed in flasks in our pockets, or slung in pouches over our shoulders.

The first view of the lake, as we emerged from the skirt of woods, was very fine—a vast sea of waving grass. Water could not have yielded more readily to the influences of the breeze than did the long and feathery herbage which spread for miles before us. Wave after wave rolled up grandly to the shores, making long sweeps and broad furrows where the wind played freely, and petted into dimples and eddies as they rounded the headlands, and were met by opposing currents.

But we did not stand long to look. There was a stronger attraction in the clouds of game which from time to time were floating over the lake from one feeding-ground to another; and we plunged into the long grass, riding till we got within gunshot of the nearest pond, and then proceeding more cautiously on foot, that we might not alarm our quick-sighted prey.

'There!' exclaimed the Captain, in a nervous whisper, 'what a fine chance! Why did you not shoot?'

I gave him no cause, you may rest assured, for a second similar remark, for as he afterward laughingly said, 'I let nothing escape my *aim*;' impossible distances never daunted me; all I wanted was to see the bird, and bang went my gun, and away flew the shot, describing harmless parabolas in the air. The consequence was, that before my companion had done any thing my shot was all gone; and not caring to burn powder to no purpose, nor to shorten his sport by borrowing his

ammunition, I left the field and wandered off in search of the chasms of which I had heard so much.

I soon came to one of the gullies which traverse the bed of the lake. It was perfectly dry, but it was easy to tell from the appearance of the sand which way the waters had run; and walking down an imperceptible slope, a few hundred paces brought me to a kind of basin, in the farther side of which I saw the subterraneous opening. I could make nothing of it. I might as well have tried to study the constitution of the human brain by looking into the orifice of the external ear. For about a foot there was a stratum of sand mixed with a rich loam, but then came the rough and jagged edges of crumbling limestone; and these were so irregular, and were so lapped one above another, that nothing more could be seen than six or seven feet below the surface.

The irregular shape of this aperture suggested to my mind the reason why the waters, as I mentioned above, suddenly ceased to flow. The fish and rubbish of all kinds which were carried down might easily have choked up the entrance, and for a time at least have obstructed the passage altogether. But why the waters should run away at all, or where they ran to, I found nothing to help me decide; nor has any one whom I have asked been able to tell. It is the general opinion here that the lake has committed this same freak at least once before, although none of the present generation remember any thing about it. A stump of a pine tree, which must have taken at least forty years to grow, is found in one of the lowest parts of the bed of the lake; and it is not too much to argue from this circumstance, that for so long a period, a great while ago, the place was bare of water. Beside this, I have been told that some Indian pans were found near one of the chasms, as if it had in old times been a camping-ground or spring. But it is probable enough, without any proof except what is found in the nature of the strata of which this part of the earth is composed. After we got below the soil we came to a bed of 'rotten limestone,' which goes down nobody knows how deep. We have tried to get through it once or twice, in the attempts we have made at Artesian wells; and at once at least in the capitol-yard we got down several hundred feet; but it was a hopeless undertaking. We broke our augers, and our wise legislators have to content themselves with surface water instead of drinking it fresh from the antipodes.

Well, this vast body of limestone is nothing but a petrified honey-comb, and there are chambers enough in it to hold all the water that was ever drunk in by the deserts of Zahara: of course therefore the only thing that is necessary when we desire to empty our lakes is to cut a hole in the bottom, and they sink. This unsoundness in our physical construction had the effect of frightening from among us a worthy immigrant from either the Granite or the Key-stone state. Finding no spring in his immediate neighborhood, his first care after 'squatting' on a desirable piece of the public domain, was to dig a well. He and his son John and his boy Jim in a few days got pretty well down into the bowels of the earth, and hoped that one day's labor more would furnish them with a purer and cooler draught than they could get from the Branch, near half a mile away. Such were

their attempts at night; for they had heard the sound of water, and a few more strokes they were certain would cut the vein and bring its volume into their well. But to their dismay they found next morning that the bottom of their well had fallen out, and a heavy current was moving lazily along and gradually undermining the ground on which they stood. It did not take them long to harness up their oxen, to throw their skins and kettles into their carts, and to 'be movin'.' They were assured that hundreds of years might elapse before the earth would cave, but it was to no purpose; and I should not be surprised to hear that they are planting corn and roasting potatoes very near the place from which they originally came. But I am running away from my lake.

After satisfying my curiosity, I bethought myself of returning to the gallant Captain, and as the sun was nearly down, of setting our faces homeward. But it is an old experience that the descent to Avernus is an easier thing than to retrace your steps, and my fate was classical. To follow my footsteps in the sand was an easy thing enough; but when I came to the place where I entered the gully, there was the 'opus' and the 'labor.' All around me and two feet above me I saw interminable fields of grass; and my passage through had left no more trace than that of the birds I had been seeking had done upon the air. 'Whichever way I turned' was grass; and to continue the burlesque upon the hero, who is quite *à propos* to subterraneous thoughts, I could have confessed 'myself am grass,' if it would at all have helped me out of the difficulty. I travelled on, not knowing whether I was right or wrong, occasionally firing off my powder and shouting always until I was completely tired out; and then I laid down upon an arm-full of the said grass and rested.

How long I should have remained there I do not know; but fortunately sportsmen came within hail, and in answer to my appeal, pointed out where the Captain and the horses were. I took the direction, and watching the sun, hurried to them. I had been going precisely wrong for more than a mile, and but for the sportsmen I should have been compelled to spend the night upon the lake. A short ride brought us to B—, where we had a comfortable dinner by candle-light, and then a long dark ride carried two tired people home. The next day the servant brought us, nicely cleaned, the brant the Captain had bagged; but when I asked him for the snipe that I had shot, he declared they were only kildees!

Between you and me, Mr. EDITOR, Tom ate those snipe himself!

Yours,

Tallahassee, (Florida,) January, 1842.

WISDOM: A LACONIC.

NOR men nor days unborn, untold,
Shall ever witness WISDOM old;
For she alone, refreshed by time,
Still marches onward to her prime;
Doomed, like the lines herself can teach,
T' approach it never — never reach.

