

CHAPTER VI.

DOWN THE INDIAN RIVER.

WE crossed the river one night, after waiting two days for a wind. The water was all aglow with phosphorescent light. Every dash of our little boat raised a silver shower, and thousands of fish darted hither and thither, leaving tortuous trails of fire, like those Fourth of July serpents of our boyhood. Rafts of ducks sprang up with noise like thunder; invisible, but for the fiery shower they raised upon leaving the water.

It was the Antiquarian who went for turtle-eggs over to the ocean beach. The Historian, during his absence, explored one of the creeks near the camp in his skiff. During this trip he declared he was a witness to one of those episodes in animal life that seem to warrant the belief that many birds are possessed of higher attributes than are generally accorded to them, and have something more than mere instinct.

His attention was called to a disturbance among the mangroves of a little islet near, and soon there flapped into view a black duck, a female, evidently wounded. Close in her wake followed a sly-looking coon, his attention so occupied with the duck as not to notice the Historian till fairly in view. Then he hesitated; but the duck brushed so near his nose that he again took up the pursuit, throwing a glance occasionally at the Historian. It was interesting to watch them; keeping just ahead of her pursuer, the duck would beat the water quickly all the time in evident pain, and would so delude the old fellow that he finally seemed to think of nothing else but catching her. What a

puzzled expression his shrewd face wore, when, after nearly placing his paw upon her, she would escape! Then he would stop, look at the Historian as if to say, "What the deuce does all this mean?" and arching his back, would again pursue with long leaps. For over a quarter of an hour did the duck play with him, till having enticed him a sufficient distance from her nest, she flew away. If ever the face of a sharp-nosed coon wore a sheepish look, it was the face of that same coon. And the Historian afterward acknowledged: "I accelerated his sneaking trot by a charge of duck-shot."

The moon went down as we reached Sand Point. We arose next morning, and looked about us. There had been little change since the Historian was first here, about two years before; but different people occupied the shops and boats, and there were few familiar faces.

Jim, our guide, here met an old acquaintance, and improved the day of leisure here by going off on "a time," returning at night in a state of garrulous inebriety. He insisted upon telling us how it was he had the fight with the Seminoles, and why Charley Osceola had his hand slit. This is the way he began:—

"Well, now, lemme tell you. You see, Charley and me, we got drunk, and he told me something on Tommy Tiger, and then I told it, and that made trouble.

"What was it I told? Well, lemme tell you. Charley, he said Tommy kill white man, long time ago. So, when Tommy come in—he'd been hunting out to Okechobee—I said to him, 'You miserable red rascal! you kill white man.' And he said, 'How you know?' And I said, 'Charley told me;' and then he and Tommy Tiger was mad right off.

"What happened then? Well, lemme tell you. Charley, he come to me and wanted to kill me, and I said, 'You red fool, you. I kill you!' and we got to fighting, and Sim Smith,—he was drunk too,—he undertook to stop us, and grabbed Charley by the throat, who bit a chunk right out of Sim's hand.

"Then the squaws come up and tied Charley and me, and then we cooled off. But, lemme tell you, next time Charley got drunk, he just went for me and wanted to fight; but I got him quiet by telling him I had a bottle of whiskey out in the scrub, and he went out with me, and when he had his drink, I just hit him on the head with a billet of wood, and told him just to keep still after this, and let me alone.

"Well, lemme tell you. 'Twa'n't long after this before we both got drunk ag'in, and he got after me and I tried to cut his lights out of him. Then the squaws tied us both up to trees, and the mosquitoes nearly eat us up before the old hags cut us loose ag'in.

"Did the tribe take any notice of it? Well, lemme tell you. They just held a council of war, when they all got back to Miami; and old Tiger Tail, he split Charley's hand open.

"Did n't he object? Well, lemme tell you. What could he do? It was either to have his ears cut off smooth, or his nose cut off, or his hand slit. He thought he'd rather have his hand slit, and so 't was done. Then he had to go off by himself for one full moon. Tommy Tiger, he was afraid I'd tell of what he'd done, and write to the Great Father at Washington, and so he never bothered me any more."



TIGER TAIL.

This authentic narration of Jim's exploits will give the reader some sort of conception of the guide we had. His wild freaks had given him a reputation throughout the whole coast region; he was feared and admired by all the rough residents of this section, who generally allowed him to do as he pleased. We could get no other man who would undertake to pilot us through to Lake

Okechobee, however, and so we put up with his vagaries; only giving him as few chances as possible to get at the whiskey-bottle.

The region about Sand Point presented a succession of beaches and bays, with whitest sand, and coquina rock overtopped by palmettos. The settlement was not a large one, comprising a hotel, boarding-house, and a few score houses; but it was then the most important on the river. Since our visit Sand Point has been connected with the St. John's by a railroad, and a steamer runs up and down the river, or lagoon; but at that time the nearest point of the St. John's region was Salt Lake, six miles away, and the only water-craft were sloops and schooners.

The white lines of sand between the blue water and the green hammocks give a beautiful effect to the shores all along the lagoon.

The "hammocks" consist mainly of oaks and pines, and they are the darkest green of all the clumps of trees along the shore.

This term "hammock" may need to be explained to some readers; hence what follows below:—

"An old writer classifies the land of Florida under the heads, 'pine, hammock, savanna, swamp, marsh and bay, or cypress galls.' He mentions the existence in the hammocks of '*chamærops frondibus palmatis plicatis, stipitibus ferratis*, of whose fruit all animals are very fond.' He says the pine-barrens receive their name from the '*pinus foliis longissimus ex una theca ternis*.' I suppose any one with a clear head can see the difference between lands bearing such widely dissimilar trees, when the author so clearly states their specific names. Further, under the head of 'high' and 'low' hammock is comprised the richest land of Florida. For land that produces crops of cane year after year, the Floridian will choose hammock land. If I were writing a letter upon the agriculture of Florida, I might go on and describe the many advantages possessed by hammock land over the rest; but I am not, and find that instead of merely supporting myself in the use of the term 'hammock,' I have branched off into the relative merits of the peculiar qualities of Florida vegetation, soil, or what not, termed hammock and pine-land. Whether the term is confined to Florida or not, I am unable to say; but certain it is that it has a peculiar signification not possessed elsewhere. It may be applied to any clump of trees strikingly different from those surrounding it, as 'cabbage (palmetto) hammock,' 'live-oak hammock,' etc. Regarding soil, it is called 'shell,' if high and growing upon one of the many shell-heaps of Florida, or 'swamp,' if low and wet."



A LITTLE BAY BACK OF OLEANDER POINT.

The Historian interjects this item of information, as he is better acquainted with Florida's resources than the Antiquarian, who is supposed to be the writer of this chapter. But we will feel just as much obliged to him for the information as though he had been asked to contribute it. Some people are so full of knowledge, that they froth it over upon the slightest provocation.

The wind blowing through the palmetto tops makes a peculiarly angry sound, and is especially effective when lashing the broad leaves against their trunks. This was the sound we heard on the second morning at Sand Point; but our boatman decided to start, and we had to follow his advice. Before noon the wind was blowing heavily and the seas running high, and our small boat astern twice parted the line by which it was towed.

About mid-afternoon we were obliged to seek the shelter of a little bay back of Oleander Point. Here the coquina rock forming the shore is worn into a thousand fantastic shapes; the most curious, perhaps, was where the palmettos had grown out of it, leaving a hole the exact shape of the bole after it had been blown over; and not only this, but the various holes through which the roots and rootlets had penetrated, with their thousand ramifications. The beach is composed of disintegrated shells, white as snow, and forming a crescent-shaped bar running out into the water nearly half a mile. Hovering about this bar continually during the day, are those most graceful of sea-swallows, the roseate terns. Below our landing-place was an upturned boat, which had been wrecked in the gale, and its occupants drowned. It is said that Indian River can get up a heavier blow at shorter notice, than any other body of water of its size in the world.

The Historian stretched a rope between two palms, and threw a piece of canvas over it, fastening one side down against the sand and leaving an open front, where a fire was built, and we had a most comfortable shelter for the night.

The wind changed to the westward during the night, and we started at daylight down the river, reaching Elbow Creek in a couple of hours, into which we turned for shelter. As we went over the bar, a great wave struck us fairly in the back, setting some of our things afloat.

Mr. Houston, the resident at Elbow Creek, is an old Indian fighter, having served through the seven years of the first war. His reminiscences were interesting, especially to me, as he had fought Indians I had met at the Seminole town and while hunting, and had fought at localities I had recently visited.

A wedge-shaped coquina rock terminates Merritt's Island, two miles east of Elbow Creek. The rocky shores here are worn into innumerable caverns, their roofs supported by water-wrought pillars and groined arches. The island comes down to this point, ever narrowing, till it terminates a mile north of a palm-crowned point upon the eastern shore. A deep bay is formed, crescent-shaped, covered with dainty shells. Bordering this bay is a high shell-bluff, covered with wild orange-trees. Back of this bluff is an ancient earth-mound, from which leads an elevated roadway, sixty feet in width, to the sea beach a mile away.

On the extreme southern end of Merritt's Island, where the rocks are hollowed out in great caverns, and worn into every conceivable shape by the waves, a man named Stone had built himself a hut. "Old Stone"—as Jim called him—was not at home; so we inspected his shanty at our leisure. It was made of palmetto leaves, open at both ends, and filled with all sorts of old wrecking-stuff. The bed was merely a pen of boards, with old gunny-bags as bedding; while all the cooking utensils were outside, the kitchen being in the open air. The only domestic animals about were a cat and a herd of goats, the latter led by a ferocious old "Billy" with glaring eyes and branching horns.

The Historian thought this a good opportunity to try his camera and chemicals; and so, after a great deal of labor, the herd of goats was brought together near the hut, and the artist proceeded to focus the group. Just as he got his head under the focussing-cloth, old Billy started in his direction with such a determined air, and so suddenly, that the would-be photographer thought he would n't stay to complete that picture; to tell the truth, he has n't finished it yet. About five minutes later, all of us were sitting on the fence, picking out of our legs the prickly-pear spines that had got stuck into them during our rapid retreat from the Billy-goat. As for old Billy, he overturned the photographer in one desperate charge, and then pranced up and down the enclosure, chasing first one of us, then the other, till we were all adorning the top rail of the fence and looking exceedingly foolish.

"Old Stone" evidently delighted in his island home; for he had built a nice landing-place, and laid out a walk along the eastern side, besides clearing a large space which he had left for the growth of tender sprouts for his goats. He had long rows of prickly-pear and other cacti, seemingly taking a great interest in their cultivation. He had lived here for years, and might well be termed the "Crusoe of Merritt's Island." He had no love for "Old Titus," the King of Sand Point, who, he said, should be buried with his face downward so that the more he scratched the deeper he would go.



THE GREAT COLONY OF PELICANS.

Leaving this beautiful spot, where the beaches and bays were most attractive of any on the lagoon, we sailed on till near the Narrows, before entering which we made a side-trip to a mangrove island famous for its great colony of pelicans.

The pelican found on the east coast of Florida is the gray one, the *Pelicanus fuscus* of the ornithologists, while the great white pelican is rarely seen except along the west coast.

While coasting the numerous mangrove islets, we killed five blue-wing teal, and saw many hundreds of ducks and herons on the broad mud-flats. Flapping slowly above the surface of the water were the great gray pelicans, as big as geese, with their long bills and enormous pouches beneath. They grew more and more abundant, until at last the air was full of them, sailing around the low mangrove island which they had chosen as their home. This was their breeding-place; and not only were there hundreds of mature birds, but a great many young. The ground was covered with them, as well as the mangrove trees, which latter had long ago been killed by the great weight of the nests and the constant visits of the birds. The nests were bulky affairs, built of sticks, as big as a bushel-basket. Some nests contained eggs like goose-eggs in shape and size, and appearing as though they had been whitewashed. Of these eggs we collected nearly a hundred, in order to have a supply not only for our own collection, but for exchange with other naturalists at home.

It took us several hours to "blow" these eggs and clean them; and when the job was done it was nearly dark, and Jim declared — in his most emphatic way — that we must leave immediately, and set sail for the Narrows.

The wind again hauled northwest, and a heavy thunder-storm burst upon us at the entrance of the Narrows. It was dangerous navigation here, even in good weather and by daylight; but with a storm after us, and black clouds obscuring the moon, we felt that we were driving on to certain shipwreck. The channel was very narrow, and obstructed by long oyster-reefs, over which the boat's keel would frequently grate ominously. But there was no shelter on the east side of the lagoon; so we had to "trust to luck, and let her drive," with the storm thundering after us and a pelting rain drenching us to the skin.

Well along into the night, as we were sitting crouched under our tarpaulins, while Jim was at the tiller, we heard a sudden exclamation from that worthy, and looked out. "A bear!" he shouted, pointing to a black object in the water off the port bow. It was about thirty or forty yards away, and swimming directly down upon us. "And he's coming this way, boys! Get out your guns!"

The guns and revolvers had been packed in the trunks, out of the way of

the rain, and we had nothing at hand but an axe. "Give it to me, then, quick! or he'll get his paws on the rail and tip the boat over! Take the tiller, one of you!"

One of us took it, while the other hunted for some weapon of defence, and Jim scrambled forward over the baggage to the bows. The wind was still blowing fiercely, and the rain falling in sheets, so that the boat was nearly unmanageable. It was only now and then that we could see the black object in the water, so gloomy and dark were the surroundings. At last we heard an excited cry from Jim, and then a dull thud. A black paw reached up and grasped the rail; but Jim's axe descended swiftly and it fell off, only to be followed by another, which another blow caused to relax its hold. For a while the bear struggled to get a hold on the boat, but repeated and well-directed blows on his head soon made him give it up.

He then floundered about awhile, the boat forged ahead, and we were obliged to leave him, desperately wounded, no doubt, but still with life enough to prove a dangerous customer at close quarters.

Jim then crawled back and took the helm, muttering curses upon "them Yankees" who didn't know enough to keep their fire-arms ready. "We might 'a' got that bear just as well as not, if you'd only had your rifle handy; and now," he snorted contemptuously, "there's twenty dollars gone to grass, to say nothing of the meat we might have had."

This episode kept us awake till a "lee" was made, and a shelter, when the boat was anchored and we crawled on shore to try to get a little sleep. With some splinters of light-wood Jim started a fire (after infinite trouble); and as the rain now fell less violently, we tried to dry our clothes. Failing in this, we warmed our chilled limbs, and then "turned in" in our saturated blankets, where we lay all night, with the rain pouring upon us.

At dawn, next morning, the wind was still blowing, though less heavily, the rain had ceased, and the waves were lower. We were cold and wet and stiff, and most grateful was the fire Jim revived from the embers. Over this we cooked flapjacks and potatoes, and made coffee, and then set sail for the east bank of the lagoon.

Following a devious channel amongst numerous mangrove islands, we at last met a strong current setting against us, and rounding a point found shelter near the mouth of Indian River Inlet. Across a spit of sand, a hundred yards, was the ocean surf, where the waves were breaking high, with thunderous sound. Landing on the sand, we spread our wet blankets and clothing out in the sun to dry, and basked happily in its warmth.



"A BLACK PAW REACHED UP AND GRASPED THE RAIL."