

## CHAPTER XVI.

### DOWN THE OCKLAWAHA.



It was midnight, and we were half-way up the stream, — the Hulkwa-wewa ("Bad Water") of the Seminoles, and the Ocklawaha of degenerate "Crackers."

There was rivalry between the two river steamers; the "Okahumkee" passed the "Panasofskee" in the only "reach" wide enough for such a feat, and there was rejoicing and jeering on the one and lamentation and cursing on the other. The bursts of speed were tremendous, at times even reaching the unprecedented rate of four miles an hour. Old steamboat navigators of Florida waters watched this unparalleled attainment with breathless interest, and, whether friend or foe, retired after it was over to drink to an event that "marked the opening of a new era of travel in Florida."

This was at Buffalo Bluff. Victory crowned our efforts; and amid showers of sparks and lurid gleams of light, we passed the "Panasofskee." On the top of our wheelhouse was a blazing fire of pine-knots, which shot its flashes far into the black depths of the swamp. The effect was sublime; tall cypress-trees loomed up like ghosts and waltzed away into the darkness; every lichen on every tree stood out distinct, every tendril of tillandsia, and every seed-pod of the maple. A squirrel, surprised on a limb of a tall tree, dropped his paws in wonderment and stared at us open-mouthed. The last quarter of the old moon shone through the moss-draped limbs of the forest trees; great bunches of mistletoe and clumps of tillandsia, clinging to the blanched tree-trunks, looked like shaggy bears in the white moonlight.

Astern could be seen the red glare of the vanquished "Panasofskee," now gleaming through the trees, now sending a broad lane of light across the stretch of glassy water.



At daylight I climbed to the pilot-house, and found a negro at the helm. What a wonderful descendant of Ham was that negro! How skilfully he guided us, — now shaving a whole broadside of shrubbery, now grazing a protruding stump, and now just slipping over a sunken log! Placid, lake-like reaches, seldom more than a thousand feet in length, gave a bit of variety to the tortuous channel; but nakedness and misery were predominant. Bayous opened out at every turn, dotted with lilies and lettuce, reaching their blue and green into the gray of the cypress. Monarch of the swamp is the cypress, holding high its head and thrusting its spreading feet into the water, about which grow palmettos and interlacing vines. This makes a landing for a little vegetable matter, then a bit of earth, about which gather bignonias and water-lettuce, and land is formed.

The high rate of speed at which we were running required constant feeding of the furnace; and at the first wood-yard our steamer stopped, panting and wheezing, and sending valorous puffs through the forest.

Ill-starred "Okahumkee!" Most fortunate "Panasofskee"! This was the opportunity for our rival. She had wood and water; she passed us with triumphant snorts. And she kept ahead. Our superior speed availed us nothing; for attempting to pass her in that narrow channel would be like two trains passing on a single track, — it has been tried, and failed. So we sailed up into Silver Spring, with the "Panasofskee" kicking up her heels at us defiantly, ludicrously, a great cascade breaking and foaming over her stern wheel.

Was this the spring De Leon heard of, this the Fountain of Youth that started him off on his chimerical search? By rare good fortune I have trodden in the footsteps of this gallant old Spaniard, — in Florida, in Guadeloupe, and in Porto Rico, — and everywhere have found that he preferred honor and glory to gold, a peaceful life and its pleasures to the alarms and fatigues of war. He was an exception to the adventurers of those days, — this galliard old hero, this Don Quixote of the New World! It gives an added interest to this beautiful spring to think that the fame of it, as conveyed by the wild Yemasseees of the Everglades, should have reached the ears of De Leon, and have thus wrought with the early history of this country one of its most romantic episodes. Description of it at this late day would be a thankless task, as tourists and poets have rhapsodized over it by moonlight and daylight, and poured out their effusions by the ream, by the yard. There are two springs, the larger of which belches forth a volume of water forming a navigable river at the outset. From a ragged cavern sixty feet deep is poured out a flood of clear, sparkling, sulphurous water, so deep that the steamer goes to the very fountain-



head and hangs poised, as it were, between upper and nether sky; so transparent that the smallest silver coin may be followed by the eye as it sinks to the limestone ledges sixty feet beneath the surface.

To ascend the Ocklawaha by steamer was interesting, though commonplace; to descend it by dug-out would enhance every beauty and add the poetry of exploration to the prose of ordinary travel. A boat was hired, a companion was in readiness, and ere the sun had set on the day of our arrival we were gliding down the stream. For the use of the boat we paid two dollars; she was low, flat, and fifteen feet in length, propelled by paddle-power. The "Okahumkee" was to take her back when we should reach the St. John's, on her return trip. Then of the storekeeper, who had thus honored us with his confidence, we made a purchase for the trip, — a blanket, matches, some fish-lines, crackers, sardines, tin cup, sugar, and eggs. Paddle in hand, we drifted down Silver Spring Run, borne along by a four-mile current past long walls of huge cypress and plots of beautiful lilies, a turn every hundred yards, and every bend revealing some new beauty. Every object on the stream was clearly reflected, and the minutest particle visible on its bed as in the spring itself. Every little while the current was increased by other springs that caused miniature whirlpools above the deep caverns whence they sent out their aqueous tribute.

"Seems like a dream," said my companion, "to be swept so swiftly onward, past such a ceaseless panorama of beautiful scenes."

Five miles down we passed a beautiful orange-grove growing in a deserted clearing; and the Antiquarian clambered ashore, over fallen limbs and drift-logs, and secured a cluster or two of "bitter-sweets." Here the stream was bordered with scarlet cardinal-flowers, wild verbenas, yellow lilies, fragrant nymphæa, and lance-leaved sagittarias.

The Ocklawaha has its source in some small lakes south and west of Silver Spring, though the latter contributes the greatest volume of water. At the confluence of the "run" with the main stream we found a barge, old and abandoned; and here we halted awhile to take a parting glance at the silver stream, which plunged into and was lost in the turbid, sluggish current of the Ocklawaha. Just a hundred miles lay ahead of us before the river joined the St. John's, — a hundred miles through a swamp gloomy and forbidding, with only at long intervals an elevation high enough for a camp at night. The sun was setting as we again entered the boat, turned her head down the stream and to the centre of the sombre channel.

"Over our heads the towering, tenebrous boughs of the cypress  
Met in a dusky arch, and trailing mosses in mid-air



Waved like banners that hang on the walls of ancient cathedrals ;  
Deathlike the silence seemed, and unbroken, save by the herons,  
Home to their roosts in the cedar-trees returning at sunset,  
Or by the owl, as he greeted the moon with demoniac laughter."

In the gloom we drifted uncertainly. The prospect for a dry camp was not promising, but in turning a bend we saw a light, — an open fire. Near the fire was a woman, over the fire was an iron pot, — both pretty certain evidence that there must be a man near, and hence a shanty and civilization. But this woman advised us not to camp there; she "lowed" the land was high and dry and the light-wood plenty, but, in her opinion, the water was bad, and would "even spile yer whiskey ef yer had any." The yearning expressed in that woman's face as she interjected this — "ef yer had any" — caused us both to cast an involuntary glance at the blanket covering our "outfit," and then sped us on our way without regret. A mile below we found a place for a camp, landed and made a fire, and, with sardines, tea, and crackers, and a dessert of wild oranges, supped satisfactorily. A pile of palmetto-leaves formed our bed, and here, at our first camp, arose our first dilemma. We had but one blanket. By lying down in that interesting position known as "spoon fashion," we could barely manage to make it cover us. The question arose: Should we sleep on the blanket or under it? should it cover us or we it? This was so perplexing a problem that we sat up half the night trying to solve it. At last it was decided that one of us should sleep outside and the other inside, taking turns at intervals of three hours. We drew lots for position, and it fell to the Antiquarian to take the first outside; but I had not slept half an hour before I awoke shivering with cold, and found my friend rejoicing in a whole "inside," which he had secured by rolling over. After this we slept beneath the blanket, and placed heavy stones at the corners to keep it down. The man with the heaviest ballast on his side generally secured the greater portion of the blanket.

As our fire blazed brightly far into the night, it attracted the attention of some men who had been out hunting limkins, or Indian pullets, and they alarmed us by landing and inspecting the camp. We had but one firearm between us, and that a small revolver, which we both instinctively grabbed for as we awoke and saw those evil-looking faces bending over us. After a social smoke and a pull at the bottle they departed, with little speech, save to warn us against burning too much light-wood from the pile near us, as "the man ez cut that ere light-wood mought bring in a bill afor sun-up." This vision that they had evoked of the watchful wood-cutter filled us with apprehension; and one of us kept hourly watch, in momentary expectation of being prodded with a knife or plugged with a bullet. The stars twinkled, the frogs and lizards chirped, the



owls hooted, the limkin sent out his maniac laugh, and the night was vocal with their medley.

The "limkin," or "crying-bird," is such a queer ornithological specimen that I cannot refrain, in this connection, from quoting its quaint description by Bartram. One hundred years ago this enterprising botanist penetrated the then wilderness of Florida, and discovered many things new and strange, among others the limkin. "There is inhabiting the low shores and swamps of this river and the lakes of Florida, a very curious bird, called by an Indian name *Ephonskyca*, which signifies in our language the 'Crying Bird.' It is about the size of a large domestic hen; all the body above and beneath is of a dark lead-color, every feather edged or tipped with white, which makes the bird appear speckled on a near view. The eye is large and placed high on the head; the bill or beak is five or six inches long, arched or bent gradually downward, and flatted at top and beneath, which makes it appear foursquare for more than an inch. The tail is very short, and the middle feather the longest; the two shortest or outermost feathers are perfectly white, which the bird has a faculty of flirting out as quick as lightning, especially when he hears or sees anything that disturbs him, uttering at the same instant an extreme harsh and loud shriek."

This bird uttered its "extreme harsh and loud shriek" all the night through, and thereby much disturbed our rest. At five in the morning we arose from our palmetto couch, cold and stiff, enveloped in a fog that covered river and swamp. The renewing of the fire under these circumstances was a matter of extreme discomfort; but the crackling of twigs and the blazing of pine-knots soon enkindled in us a flame that quickened pulse and limb. To remove the last vestige of fog and chill from our systems, I brewed a pint-cup of egg-nog, — that is what the sinful would call it; but I said it was not regular egg-nog, as it lacked the principal ingredient against which total-abstainers set their faces.

This was Sunday; there arose a question between us, whether we ought to tie up and lie idle all day, or let the boat drift with the current. The Antiquarian advanced the rather specious argument that drifting was not working; that the stream performed its allotted task in obedience to the mandate of a Great Creator, — that it followed on and on, Sabbath and week-day alike; that we might launch our boat and drift upon its bosom without a qualm from even consciences like ours, that had been made tender by New England precepts and case-hardened by repeated applications of Shorter Catechism. "Again," he said, "look at our provisions! a few eggs, a little sugar, and two or three oranges, to say nothing of the low state of our flour and pork!"



His unrighteous argument prevailed. We launched our skiff and drifted with the current. We passed shelly bluffs with understratums of limestone, above which were fields of limited extent containing sheep and bleating lambs. As if further to recall visions of a Northern spring on this January day, we startled, every now and then, great flocks of blackbirds from the corn-like grass, which flew into the trees with whistled "chick-arees;" and a robin, a few warblers, and a wren completed the illusion. The river narrowed, and graceful palms stood up at every point, bignonias and lilies and water-lettuce joining their bases with the water. We drifted through beautiful channels, and looked down long vistas between palmettos and cypress festooned with vines, their images reflected in the mirror-like surface.

Must I pass this dream-land through and by, without securing a more lasting impression than my eye can carry to my senses in this transitory fashion? No! I would photograph its beauties, as I had done at Silver Spring; for a camera and a "dark-tent," containing chemicals and plates, folded into the compass of a large valise, were part of my outfit. But it was the Sabbath!

Again, the ever-ready sinner came to my aid with arguments in favor of improving the time as we went along. "Here were scenes unfolding that we should never look upon again; unless now secured they would be forever lost to us and the world." He prevailed; he had let down the bars at Sunday Bluff; he now drove me into the pasture. The dark-tent was opened and a plate dipped in the silver bath, while the camera was focused in position.

Drawn out from the "bath," the plate was perfectly transparent; it should have been coated with a creamy film. Another was tried, and the bath strengthened, but with like result. In making the collodion my assistant had left out the iodizer. Then my heart sank into my boots, for there was no more collodion nearer than Palatka, one hundred miles away! We packed up and paddled on in gloomy silence. The same thought seemed to be passing through our minds; for suddenly the Antiquarian broke out with, "Well, you didn't break the Sabbath so very much, after all, did you?"

In the afternoon our lesson of the morning was emphasized by our bringing up against a great log fallen across the stream, and by our having to row several miles back to the main channel against the current. A little attention would have prevented this mistake, as that river was as distinctly "blazed" as any path through the forest by the steamboat bumps and bruises on logs and trunks of trees. At one point in this tunnel through the swamp the trees approach so that there is a passage of only twenty-two feet in width, and the steamers have but a foot to spare on either side. This is called the "gate," the gate-posts being two mighty cypresses, their broad buttresses extending deep



down into the mud, their ghostly arms and fingers of limbs and branches stretched toward the sky far out of sight, above the overarching canopy of twigs and mosses. Just below the gate is the town and landing of Eureka. What the cracker who opened the place to the world found here when he bestowed upon it the name above, puzzled us to find out. What we found was a landing of stumps, with a plank leading to firmer land beyond. A sagacious man must he have been who bestowed this cognomen upon this landing. He knew of the weakness of the world in general,—to give credit always for what is expressed, without questioning; for, the vision of passing travellers being limited by the barrier of cypress, they would be prone to imagine the unseen land beyond as possessed of charms unutterable.

But I later had cause for imitating the example of the grand old Greek, and joyfully shouting "Eureka!" at the top of my lungs; for I found here that which enabled us to sail serenely on down the stream, picturing its beauties as we went. A man who met us as we paddled up to the plank at dusk informed us that the owners of the clearing, the "Harrison boys," were absent, but extended an invitation to their cabin. Securing our boat, we followed our new acquaintance to a humble hut of logs, where he made us welcome. The inevitable hog and hominy was our fare, and the floor our bed; but we spread the blanket contentedly, being full of good cheer, with a fire on the hearth before us and a roof above us. At about midnight we heard the tramp of horses' feet, and two brawny men soon after entered, each with a saddle and bridle over his arm, which he flung into a corner. Of course they discovered us lying on their floor, and after the first start drew their housekeeper aside and questioned him. My dark-tent, being the most conspicuous portion of my luggage, excited remark, and one of the new-comers launched at once into a knowing dissertation upon negatives. Hearing this, the Antiquarian nudged me, who required no jogging, for at the first discussion of photographic lore I was awake immediately.

"This feller says," quoth the man who had invited us here, "thet he's gut tew go to Palatky fer chimmykels; thet he wants tew photygraph the hull river, but his col-colly-something's give out."

"Collodion's what you mean, ain't it?"

"Yis, thet's it; he's feelin' kinder pokey about it, 's right smart daown in the mouth. Naow, John, you've gut some uv thet air, ain't yer?"

"Yis, I've gut a bottle on 't somewhar."

"What will you take for it?"

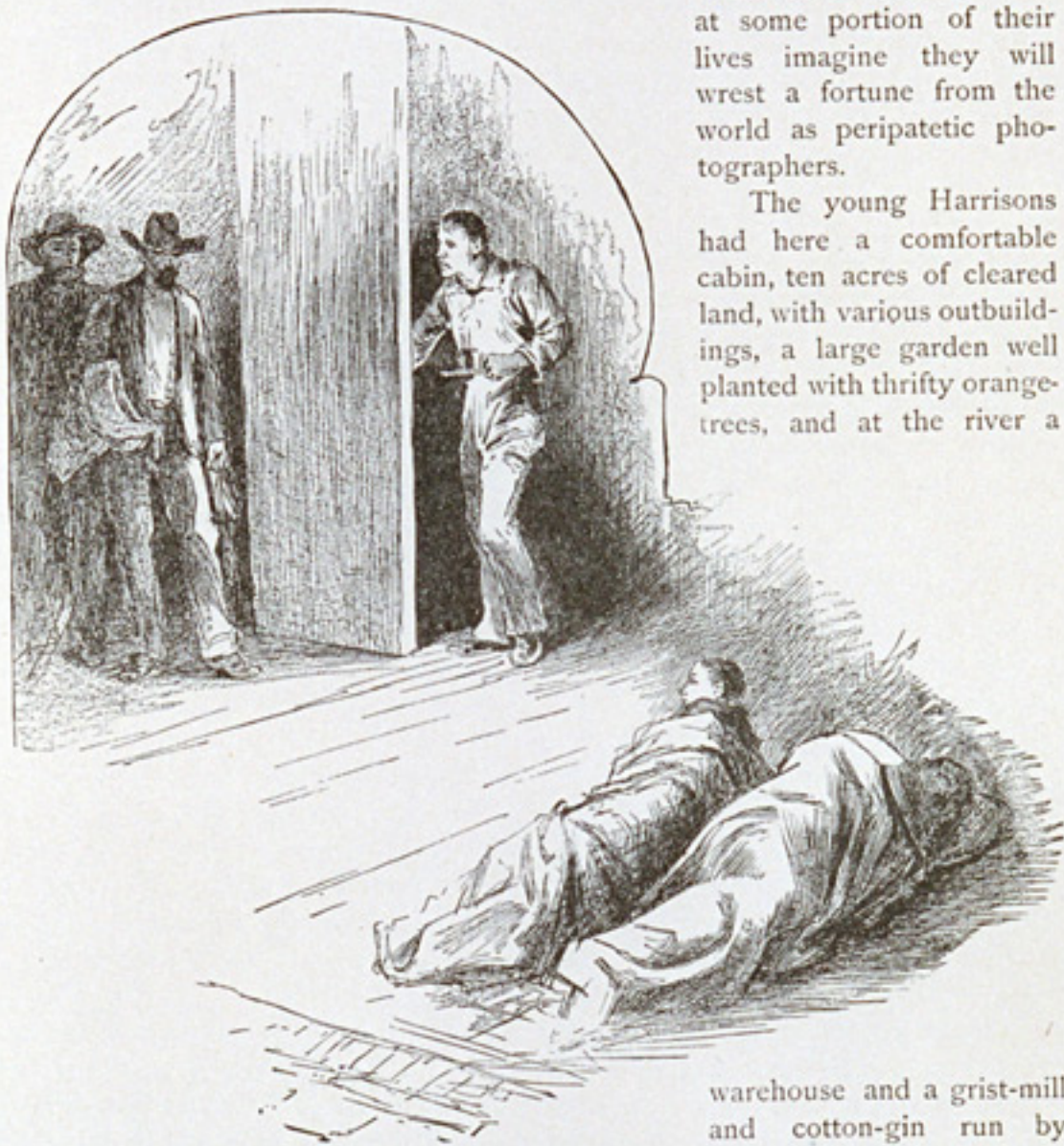
Their backs were turned toward us, and the conversation had been carried on in a low tone for fear of awaking us. To say that they were surprised at my sudden demand would be stating it but mildly.



"What will you take for that bottle of collodion?"

A satisfactory bargain was concluded, and after much conversation we retired, happy to find, in this isolated clearing, far from any settlement, one of those deluded beings who at some portion of their lives imagine they will wrest a fortune from the world as peripatetic photographers.

The young Harrisons had here a comfortable cabin, ten acres of cleared land, with various outbuildings, a large garden well planted with thrifty orange-trees, and at the river a



"TWO BRAWNY MEN SOON AFTER ENTERED."

warehouse and a grist-mill and cotton-gin run by steam. They had taught themselves everything pertaining to the running of the engine and cotton-gin, and seemed to be young men of more than ordinary intelligence. How it warms one's heart to recall,



even after the lapse of years, such instances of cheerful pluck and large-hearted endeavor as were here manifest! Many a time, when reflecting upon the great number of young men in our cities earning a precarious living by doing woman's work behind counters and in office, have I recalled the noble exertions of these cheerful young men in this clearing in the wilderness. Thousands of acres of land are open to trial in this land of sunshine, which will give a young man decided returns for outlay of labor, in at least refreshing slumber and a contented spirit.

At noon, next day, we drifted down again, through the same tortuous windings, to Log Landing. A picturesque little creek tempted us to make a side exploration, and we rowed past a thrifty little settlement, containing a nursery of orange-trees, cotton and sugar-cane, to where a large water-wheel was slowly revolving; and this made such a pretty picture, with its background of palmettos and cypress, that I tried it with my new collodion with success. The creek had been dammed and furnished sufficient water-power to turn this wheel with its dependent cotton-gins, rice-mill, and grist-mill. In this manner, all over the State, are the citizens of Florida settling the problem of its future.

Running out of the creek into the river, we rowed on, the banks not notably pretty, though hung with an increased abundance of bignonias, past Forty-foot Bluff,—a long, high ridge, crowded with palmettos and deciduous trees. In a couple of hours we suddenly came upon a lone and dilapidated warehouse standing on the river's bank, with a great pile of light-wood and orange-box shooks its only company. This, we concluded, was Iola, where we had been told we should find food and lodging. There was no other sign of house or individual; but after a long walk we reached a rambling, disjointed planter's dwelling, surrounded by fields full of wild plums and cane-grass. In these fields wild rabbits and gophers burrowed in abundance, and flocks of small birds dwelt in the mulberry, oak, and China trees that surrounded the stables and cookhouse. Here we were made welcome, and our goods were locked up in the warehouse.

From this point the famous Orange Lake was at that time reached, and we hired a cart, with mule and attendant driver, to transport us thither, desiring to see a native wild grove in process of being subjected to man. At Ocklawaha Church, a noted landmark, we met the parson on his circuit, which embraced the territory lying between Orange Springs and Silver Springs, twenty-five miles by land, and seventy-five by river. The road was stumpy and sandy, passing through palmetto-scrub and pine-barren, and there were very few settlers. The widow who owned the house at the river had expatiated upon



the beauties of the wild grove at Orange Lake in such glowing language that we both had departed from our intended route and gone to the discomfort of this ride of twenty miles in a mule-cart. The grove itself was so far beneath our expectations that we returned three days later in a pet. It was at first proposed to pass the house and go on to the river; but our better feelings prevailed, and we concluded to stop and say good-by. Arrived there, we found the widow departed, but her two demure and pretty daughters in possession and awaiting us with a tempting dinner. Ah! but that was a temptation to stop! But we were thoroughly mad, from our three days of jolting, and steeled our hearts and our stomachs, and turned our faces to the river. The girls seemed grieved that we should slight their hospitable preparations, and I confess to a pang of remorse, even at this day, five years later, that we should have allowed ourselves to be so ungallant. The younger damsel — a black-eyed, tangle-haired beauty of sixteen — did not appear to credit our intentions of leaving, and darted into the garden for some oranges for dessert; and we saw her, as we passed, plucking the golden fruit from the trees.

"Look! did you ever see a lovelier picture?" She stood in the sunlight, with hat hanging loose, clad in pure white, brought into beautiful and strong relief against the dark green of the orange-trees.

"No," replied the unhappy Antiquarian, "I never did; but we can't go back in honor now; let's go on." And so we left the plantation, with many a backward glance and reluctant feet. But we were well punished for our stubbornness that night, by a supperless camp and misfortunes that the sequel will show.

Paddling on, we reached at dusk an overgrown clearing, which, seen through a vista of cypress-trees hung with Spanish moss, and containing a small shanty, invited us to rest there for the night. No man disputed our entry, and we cut fresh leaves for a bed and built a fire near the "lean-to" roof of palmetto-fans. Having now nothing but our tea and a few crackers, we soon had supper disposed of and essayed to sleep. It must have been about midnight — everything of importance always occurs at midnight in a well-conducted camp — that my partner leaped up with a loud shout, and, to my alarmed and sleepy eyes, appeared trying to divest himself of all his apparel.

"I've got a centipede on me, or a scorpion; he's crawling down my back. There! there he is! By Jove, but what a beast!" And he jerked something out from under his vest and flung it on the ground, stamping it out of shape in a second. "Pooh!" said I, "it was n't anything harmful; there is n't anything of that kind here. Don't you remember what the land-company's books say, — 'There are no noxious insects, not one, in the entire State!'"



him on the head with a paddle, but captured no more. The river widened, as we neared its embouchure, and approached the mighty St. John's, and we drifted placidly along, past quiet bays and silent creeks that were margined with lily-pads and reflected the woods above them. On the other shore our voyage ended.