

CHAPTER IV.

POTTERY AND PANTHERS.



HUS far the Historian has had it all his own way; now let the Antiquarian come to the fore. This chapter is his.

We tried to get under way from Major Alden's wharf about nine in the morning of January 16, having been shown the channel, with its devious wanderings, from the mast-head of the "Wandering Wind." But our attempt ended in total failure, owing to the small size of our rudder and to our having loaded the big boat too much "by the head." We only succeeded, after much trouble, in getting astern of a "lighter" (live-oak raft) and making fast to her. As the captain was going to the live-oak camp down the lagoon, and in our direction, we gladly accepted his invitation to "come aboard," and let events take their course.

When night came, he furnished us with sleeping-room on the floor under the bunks, where the water lapped and gurgled all night within a foot of our faces. But we slept very well, and next morning were off "Ship-yard Reach," where that immense shell-heap known as Turtle Mound looms up grandly above the ocean sand-ridge.

The lagoon, up to this point, is full of mangrove islands, with numerous channels running off east and west, so that it is very possible that any one unacquainted with the navigation here would get lost.

It had rained hard all night; but our boat was covered with a good canvas awning, so that the goods were not injured. Our large boat is loaded heavily, its rail within six inches of the water; but she floats easily, and will doubtless go through in good condition. She is pretty full, however; and boxes, trunks, barrels, rifles, guns, and oars are sticking up in strange confusion.

The sand-ridge intervening between the lagoon and the ocean is covered with a low growth of palmetto known as "scrub," with solitary palms here and there, and a few clumps of them at long intervals. It is all one general level, except for heaps of shells, like Turtle Mound, which are found, at long distances apart, rising above the sea of palmetto scrub. These mounds, sometimes of shell and sometimes of earth, are found scattered along both coasts of Florida.

The earth-mounds are said to have been erected ages ago as the sites for the royal residences of the caciques, or head chiefs. There is one between Indian River and Salt Lake; and an especially noteworthy one is that near Tampa, on the west coast of Florida, which was found by the soldiers of Pamphilo de Narvaez, and used as a royal residence of a great cacique when in 1528 Fernando de Soto arrived there on his expedition.

This Turtle Mound is covered with a dense growth of bayberry or similar shrub, intermixed with much Spanish bayonet, prickly-pear, and creeping vines of the convolvulus family. The summit is crowned with a few orange-trees and the same dense undergrowth. Its steepest incline is westward, and in some places is very steep, and presents the appearance of two hillocks separated by a narrow gully. It is composed of oyster, quahaug, and other shells, with a great deal of broken pottery intermixed.

While the slow lighter was lumbering along, I took the skiff and rowed to a high shell-bluff, where lived a Dr. Wallace, who hospitably entertained me and showed me the Indian mounds, old fields, and burial-grounds, back of the bluff, of which there are but a few acres in all.

The bluff is about forty feet high, in two hillocks, like Turtle Mound; and from the seaward side a depressed roadway led back to a level field, where I counted the sites of twenty shell-heaps.

The Doctor had a theory that this section, at the time of occupation by the Indians, was a mere sand-bar, and that the mounds were formed when there was little or no wood there. This he proved by showing layers of charcoal from burnt reeds and rushes found in excavations. These were the remains of fires upon which the Indians (as do the negroes of the present day) placed the oysters, to be opened by the heat. The oysters have not been found here for generations, the water of the lagoon is so salt; being so dense at times that even the fish are killed by thousands, particularly the cat-fish.

In these great shell-mounds many articles of metal, beads, and vast quantities of pottery have been found. The Doctor showed me a piece of gold, about an inch long, which he found in exhuming an Indian skeleton; and he gave me the skull which was dug up with it at the time.



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THE HOUSE ON THE LAGOON.

On the next day the Historian and I found an old pike-head amongst the live-oakers, which was seven inches long and an inch and a half in breadth. It was covered with an eighth of an inch of rust, and was found about a foot beneath the surface of the ground. It was probably used by some member of one of the bands of Spaniards that ravaged this country three hundred years ago.

The Doctor had several tropical and semi-tropical trees growing near his house; but the most curious to me was the pawpaw, both wild and cultivated, which was bearing both fruit and flowers, and which he says is indigenous here, though this is the most northern point at which it is found wild.

There are but few houses along the banks of the lagoon. Perhaps the most interesting to me was the residence of Uncle Arad, whom we met first at New Smyrna. Uncle Arad was about seventy years old, about five feet high, and very much shrivelled. His pale blue eyes were sunken and watery; his beard gray with yellow tobacco stains. He had a peculiar habit of muttering to himself at odd times, when he would seem to be wholly abstracted, and would then gather up the hem of his coat, and holding it at half arm's-length would talk to it for hours at a time. At times he would look at me intently, all the while holding out his coat-skirt and talking at it. I once saw him on the beach thus occupied, and talking, apparently, to a duck. Every few steps as he walked along, he would stop and hold converse with his coat and whatever happened to be within range of his vision. Poor Uncle Arad! All his troubles began with a lightning-stroke in Texas, which killed his idolized wife, many, many years ago.

The Historian has described the live-oakers' camp, and it only remains for me to add such bits of information as he has left for my chapter.

By the time we had reached this point on our journey we were possessed of a veritable camping-out appetite; that is, we could sit down and eat all there was before us. And the coffee! As my cup holds nearly a quart, I had at first great difficulty in draining it at a sitting; but by this time that is a feat easily accomplished, and I regard it as a duty to see my face in its shining bottom at every meal. The provisions we brought from home were very welcome, especially the cookies and doughnuts, though the pies were soft and mouldy. I really don't know how we shall get along without mother's pies; six months without pie is a terrible prospect to contemplate!

It was interesting to learn from Captain Swift that he saw the great naturalist Audubon, when he was in Florida; but he remembered only that he was clad in a buckskin hunting-shirt, had a gun as long as himself, and was very dirty. He was alone, as usual. The Swifts were then beginning work upon

the same great hammock they have just now finished. Forty years working in one tract of woodland! It was here, doubtless, that Audubon got his episode (related in his Biography) of the Adventures of a Live-oaker.

The Historian and I went out hunting frequently, but met with no great success. A Mr. Lewis, a famous hunter here, told us he saw a "tiger" in the road between New Smyrna and Enterprise, some time ago. It was about nine feet long, with a dark brown body, tail tipped and head barred with black. Upon seeing Mr. Lewis the panther stopped and looked at him, then cantered along leisurely ahead of him.

Panthers are killing all the deer about this section, and are very troublesome. The deer are still very numerous, and the best time to hunt them is in midwinter. The bucks drop their horns about February, March, and April, when the does have their fawns. By the end of August the fawns are weaned, and the does in fine condition; but the bucks are poor, and are at their best between October and February, especially about New Year's. One may often find their cast-off horns in the woods, and see trees with the bark scraped off by the bucks when rubbing their horns "in the velvet," when they are growing.

In the "piny woods" there are rattlesnakes, and in the swamps the moccasins, both very poisonous. One of the hunters we employed was poisoned by being scratched by the fang of a rattlesnake he had shot and was drawing out of the bushes after it was dead. Though he cut the end of his finger off, and tied up his arm to stop the circulation, he nearly died before reaching home, where he drank all the whiskey he could find, and barely saved his life.

The opinion in Florida is, that the poison fang is dangerous so long as it exists, and that the head ought to be burned at once after the reptile is killed.

The customary antidotes for rattlesnake venom are said to be, a solution of bread soda in water, to bathe the wound with and to drink, and equal parts of the white of an egg, salt, and powder, to be bound on the wound and renewed every few hours. A West-Indian remedy is to cut open a live chicken and bind it upon the wound while warm and bleeding. Whiskey, it seems, is the best thing to drink, except a solution of ammonia, and a great deal of the spirits is needed then to intoxicate. The limb, if an arm or leg is bitten, should be tied tightly above the bitten spot. The Seminole Indians have a remedy they call *pah-sah* (or rattlesnake-master),—a small plant, the root of which they chew to a pulp and bind at once upon the incision made by the fang.

It is the prevailing opinion that a rattlesnake will always give the alarm by rattling before he strikes. But this alarm cannot be depended upon, as the



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snake will sometimes strike first and rattle afterwards. A dog belonging to one of the hunters saw one day a rattlesnake gliding along, and pounced upon it, when the snake turned and bit it, and then rattled half a minute later. The dog lived but two hours, although everything was done to save its life, such as cauterizing the wound and flashing powder into it.

The old naturalist Bartram, who came to Florida in the last century, would never kill a rattlesnake, calling it a generous animal that never struck at man without giving the alarm. But it must have deteriorated in the past hundred years; and it will always be best to kill the snake at sight.

Of all the animals of these woods that have the power to harm man and do not freely use it, perhaps the panther is the most generous. Captain Swift says that he and his brother once passed a panther in the woods, as they were riding, that only sat up and snarled at them. After they had gone some way, they tied their horses and were looking at some timber, when they saw the animal coming towards them, evidently following in their tracks. The Captain picked up a handspike, and shied it at the beast (it came so near), when it drew itself up and snarled horribly, but soon bounded into the bushes and disappeared. Two of the axemen, at work in a hammock, were "squaring" a great live-oak log they had felled, and very intent upon their work, when a panther crept stealthily up, drew their dinner off the end of the log, bolted it, and disappeared. They were so frightened that they ran all the way to camp.

This event occurred a few days before our arrival; but the panther episode most talked about was one in which figured Jim Scobie, an old Indian River guide. We asked Jim for the particulars, and he told us all about it:—

"It was on Pelican Island. I was down thar durin' the last trouble with the Injuns, an' was a-huntin' pink curlew, that used to breed thar, for the officers of the rigiment at Fort Capron. I was a-goin' along, a-shootin' on the wing, an' lookin' up more 'n down, when all of a sudding I see two fiery eyes a-looking at me outen a clump of mangroves. Then I saw somethin' movin', and see another pair, an' knew to oncet they was both panthers. Wall, I slipped back, an' rammed in two buck-shot wire cartridges, and one of these I fired at the fust panther, an' killed him dead. The other, he run off, an' I let him have hit, an' he drapped. That's all there is to my panther story. Yaas, there's plenty in these hammocks, an' you youngsters may run across 'em yit, before you git back this yer way ag'in."