



An Early Morning "Spin" on the Lake

## A CAMP IN THE ADIRONDACKS

By Jessamy Harte



WHEN an enthusiastic Adirondack lover has finished reading Murray's "Adventures in the Wilderness," he is apt to be very discontented, and longs to have been among those mountains twenty-five or thirty years ago, when the great North Woods were indeed a vast wilderness; when no axe had sounded along its mountain

sides, or echoed across its peaceful waters. But in spite of the amount of desecration this exquisite forest has suffered at the hand of civilization, it still contains in its depths, far from the madding crowd of hotels and boarding houses, the same majesty that awed the first band of discoverers who trespassed upon its solitude. The great trees of the "forest primeval" are there with their towering branches like huge arms stretched out in loving protection above the heads of their little ones.

And yet, notwithstanding the thousands of people who annually visit these mountains and flock about the hotel verandas, comparatively few have ever known the joy of standing beneath one of these monarchs of the forest and of having camped under its deep shade. Many fashionable young women with Saratoga trunks journey to these mountains, only to sink exhausted upon the hotel piazzas, where they remain for the most part, going hardly beyond the hotel limits during the rest of their stay. Of course, those who are great invalids must of necessity be content with the superb views which are so graciously spread before them; but for those more favored mortals who are capable of appreciating the physical as well as mental enjoyments of the wilderness, camp life is the Elysium for which they are looking, and the Adirondacks their "Happy Hunting Ground." Camping, until of late years, has been the almost exclusive enjoyment of men, women having been considered rather useless and burdensome under the circumstances; as incongruous, in fact, as a Dresden vase would be. But now that women have proved that they are not so frail and helpless, and that total exhaustion does not necessarily follow the ascent of a hill, and that they are quite as capable of enjoying the rough life and thriving on it as their masculine friends, camp life has taken on a new charm, and the men are glad to have the companionship of the fair sex upon these expeditions. With a jolly party of both sexes there is no limit to the delight and fun that may be experienced.

There is such a novel charm about the old forest, and such a fascination in being removed from ordinary daily life and of living a sort of romantic holiday. Many stand a trifle in awe of the vast woods, and the proposal "to camp" is often met by the following despairing objections: "Won't we catch cold? Aren't you afraid? What shall we wear? Won't we look like guys?" It is a mystery to me why people think that the moment they give up the restrictions of conventional social life, they must necessarily make themselves look as ugly and unattractive as possible. Why should the old forest not be respected? It indeed gives us a most beautiful and picturesque background. Some of the costumes which I have seen must verily have offended its critical eye.

Crimson is a picturesque color for the feminine camping dress. A very striking costume for a young lady is a short kilt skirt, a little above the ankles, of some blue material; a short, blue corduroy velvet jacket, blue and white striped tennis shirt, russet leather leggings, and big, red felt sombrero. The men's get-up varies little from the ordinary mountain garb—short corduroy velvet trousers and jacket, woolen tennis shirt, and leather leggings. The latter are essential both for girls and men on account of the enormous amount of underbrush one encounters. You cannot imagine how picturesque these costumes look around the roaring camp-fire in the evening, or in groups on the shores of some beautiful lake. A gentleman once said to me, while admiring some pictures I had of "camp": "Why, how well you all look! Do you know, I

thought that in camp the women wore healthful but hideous garments, and the men went unshaven and looked slouchy." So you see no young lady need ever be afraid of appearing at a disadvantage in camp, nor is her sweetness wasted on the desert air.

It is rather an arduous task though, to get up a congenial party, one that will hang together "in clear and stormy weather," as the saying is. In selecting your party you must not forget your funny man; he is as essential to its success as a clown is to a circus. He is the life of the camp always; the one who is always getting you into scrapes, and the only one who comes out of them unharmed. You must also have a recognized head, or leader, with an aptitude for managing two or three trusty guides, and among the rest of the dramatis personæ, good singers, story tellers, etc. Then, too, that "necessary evil," the chaperone, should be of semi-angelic character, else she will never successfully accomplish the care of such a party. With such a chaperone and party success is sure.



A View of a Typical Adirondack Camp

The three-sided log camp or "lean-to" has become a substitute almost entirely in the Adirondacks for the ordinary canvas tent, and as the floor is also made of planked boards there is no danger of the dampness which was an evil of the floorless tent. The "lean-to" has a slanting roof at the back, two perpendicular sides, and is open in front. There is a bed at the back resembling a stateroom berth, which is made of boards thickly carpeted with balsam boughs and covered with blankets. There is no more comfortable bed in the world; the odor of the balsam is most conducive to sleep, and insomnia is unknown in camp. At the front of the "lean-to" are usually hung curtains, generally of Turkey red, and when these are draped back during the day the effect of these little houses, with the never-dying camp-fire burning before them, is picturesque in the extreme. This fire is kept burning as religiously as were the old Vestal fires of Athens, and the guides, though rather rugged priests, are as faithful as the Vestal virgins.

We camped once on Long Lake, Hamilton County, one of the most beautiful of all the Adirondack lakes. Near its head stood one of the lovely mountain hotels, and close by were several rude farm-houses and a country store, but the rest of the shore was delightfully wild and picturesque. Here and there at considerable distances one could discover camps peeping out from beneath the pine trees. We started from the hotel for our destination, which was at the extreme end of the lake, at about three o'clock on one of those clear, refreshing afternoons so common among the mountains. There was a slight breeze blowing, filled with the balsamic odors of the forest, fanning the lake into ripples and waving the trees along the shore. The groves of slim, white birch trees, those pale maidens of the forest, whispered among themselves. Three of our boats were rowed by the guides, who took care of our "duffle," meaning luggage in camping parlance. We rowed under the floating bridge near the country store in single file, and passed the last farm-house,

(our Sandy Hook) about a half mile above. We reached our camp at sunset; the guides having already arrived were unloading the boats and pulling them up along the shore. The camp stood on a high bluff which projected into the lake, steep and precipitous on one side, but gently sloping down to a smooth, shiny beach on the other. There were nine or ten "lean-tos" scattered along the cliff, while on the beach near the lake was a rough bark building, with a long table in the center, which we were informed was our dining hall. The owners of the camp who had built it the year before had arranged pieces of sail cloth like curtains on each side, in case of stormy weather. We scrambled up the rocks to our new abodes in a state of great excitement. We were all novices at camping, except our chaperone and her husband, who knew as much about the woods as the guides themselves. The huge camp-fire was already built and crackled away in the most friendly and cheerful manner. Suddenly the clear notes of a cornet were heard from the beach below, and then a shout: "Come boys, grub's ready!" which was meant to convey to our scandalized ears that supper would be served in the log house below. Alas! the demon of slang had already taken possession of the dude of the camp and transformed him into a backwoodsman. We were all very hungry, the breath of the pines having exaggerated our already healthy appetites. Our first meal was a novel as well as merry one to us all. The long bark table was set in a most unconventional manner, tin plates, brown china cups (no saucers) and old knives and forks, the table being decorated with leaves put under the plates and around the dishes. In the center was a long, green olive bottle filled with wild flowers and decorated with ferns, making a charming jardinière. The view from our dining hall was superb; the lake stretched before us in all its wild romantic beauty. Far off in the distance the peaks of Santanoni and Mt. Seward, with their rugged outlines, stood out against the rose-colored sky. There was that peculiar hush that comes at sunset; only the sound of the water lazily lapping the shore, and now and then the baying of a hound far away on some distant lake broke the silence. We could not help being affected by this exquisite picture, those who were nature lovers among us, but alas! our reverie was brought to a rather abrupt and unromantic close by the appearance of our head cook at the door with a huge plate of venison. Oh how we did enjoy our

unconventional supper; but I am afraid our table manners suffered greatly from its very unconventionality.

After supper we proposed rowing across the lake to see "Mother Nichols," as she was called, an eccentric old woman, the widow of an old woodsman who had died several months before. No one could persuade her to move from their little log cabin where her husband had brought her a bride, some sixty years before. Her house stood about a mile from the shore, half way up the mountain side. Our guides told us that "folks said the view from there was extra fine," and as the moon would soon be out there was no danger of being lost. So we started, leaving two guides behind us to take care of the camp. When we reached the opposite shore we sounded the camp call; it was immediately answered by the report of a gun fired from camp. The path leading to the cabin was very rocky and hard to climb; and when we arrived at the hut we were surprised to see no signs of life anywhere. "Why, it's deserted! Where's the old woman?" we cried. "Hush," said our guide, "she's there all right taking her evening smoke." "Good evening Mother Nichols" said our chaperone, addressing space; "we have come to pay you a little visit, and to take a look at your beautiful view." "I am proud to see you, ma'am" said a cracked voice from the shadow, and an old woman stepped out into the moonlight. She was a veritable hag, hollow-cheeked and eyed, with no teeth and a bony, angular figure. In one hand she held her clay pipe, the other she extended to each of us as we were presented to her by turn. This ceremony seemed to please her greatly, and she insisted upon getting us some cider and apples. She said that "since the old man died" she was in the habit of sitting there in the darkness and enjoying the view herself; but if she had known she was going to have "kempany" she'd have "lighted up a spell." She pointed out to us the innumerable lakes we saw in the distance, calling them by name, and relating some little story or legend about nearly every one of

them. I think she really appreciated the blessing of possessing such a view, for she seemed to take such interest in pointing out its beauties to us. She had always lived among the mountains, they were all friends to her.

When we left her she insisted upon coming half way down the rocks with us; it was wonderful to see how agile she was, refusing all assistance that was offered her. I think she was not insensible, however, to the courtesy she met with, for her old eyes glistened strangely as we bade her good-bye, with promises to come again. Perhaps it was the vision of her own young days that had come to her with the youthful faces she saw about her, that dimmed her eyes. As we rowed away she seemed to us like some wizard who owned the great view she loved so well.

As we neared the camp, the friendly light of the camp-fire glowing through the trees seemed to welcome us back. The great forest had fallen asleep, so still it seemed. Our guides had some sandwiches made for us, thinking we might be hungry, and we sat around the fire, listening to marvelous stories from the guides, singing and playing on our banjos, until it was time to retire. If the rest of our stay was to be as jolly as the evening we had just spent we would indeed be willing to camp for the rest of our lives, so deeply in love with it we had already become. We climbed all the mountains about us, and explored every lake or pond for miles around. Our friends visited us from neighboring camps, when we entertained them with some impromptu charades given in the open air. The stage setting was a trifle Wagnerian, I will admit, a most fitting background for a Seigfried or Brunhilde, but we trusted to the imagination and indulgence of our audience to make our performances successful as social dramas. Every manner of game from whist to leap-frog was indulged in at camp. On rainy days we would all assemble on one of the largest "lean-tos" or in the dining-room, where we played games and sang, and in fact amused ourselves in a hundred different ways. I think we rather enjoyed a rainy day now and then, but more than one was not so pleasant. We fairly reveled in the sunshine after one of these "spells of weather."

Our dances, too, under the pines, were a never-to-be-forgotten enjoyment of the camp. As we were all fond of dancing, these rural hops were indulged in, so that it was necessary to have a platform built for that special purpose. Numberless Chinese lanterns were hung on the branches above, and the huge trees encircled our ball-room with a weird charm. Our invitations were written on pieces of birch bark and delivered by the guides to our friends, when one of these fêtes was about to occur. At eight o'clock the guests would arrive, the men arrayed in picturesque tennis suits, and the girls in all their finery; muslin dresses that had lain asleep all summer were permitted to grace the vanities of the world once more. Our orchestra consisted of two fiddles and a cornet, which were played by the guides with exhilarating effect. Waltzes and polkas followed in rapid succession, but we usually ended our dances with a good old-fashioned Virginia reel. What soft lights the lanterns shed, and how like wood-nymphs the girls looked, stepping out, as it seemed, from the very trees themselves.

When the hunting began, those who could shoulder a rifle wandered off with the hunters far into the forest, leaving the others to keep house at camp. Many a time I have waited on a rock at the end of a "run-way," with bated breath for the appearance of the game; but alas, no deer ever came near me. I am afraid the men thought the girls talked too much to be successful hunters; perhaps that was as true as it was uncomplimentary. However, we had some fine rifle matches, when we distinguished ourselves with our high scores, and we quite outstripped the men in catching fish. We went on many exploring expeditions, rowing up some lovely little river, suddenly finding ourselves on some unnamed wild lake or pond white with lilies. What exquisite views we saw about us daily, for we never looked out from our "lean-tos" but to feast our eyes on some charming picture. The wild, romantic lake always before us, the stately mountains ever in view. We grew to love every tree that shaded us, and I am sure this great intimacy with nature and mother earth could have had nothing but a helpful and inspiring influence upon us. The material for the artist to immortalize is always there, the silent thoughts for the poet to utter are there too, in the deep shadows. The rest for the weary ordinary human being there awaits him.

"And so in mountain solitudes—o'er-taken  
As by some spell divine  
Their cares drop from them like the needles shaken  
From out the gusty pine."



The Log Dining Hall