

## SOUTH FLORIDA SCENERY.



IN THE OPEN WOODS.

**T**HE Lake district of South-central Florida has, up to the present, met with but scant justice from the public, overwhelmed as it is by the double disadvantage of being credited by the ignorant with all the faults possessed by other parts of the State, and of being so extravagantly and outrageously praised by the boomer that people begin to disbelieve even more than is necessary.

In some parts of Florida one sees nothing but uninteresting stretches of flat unbroken pine-woods; but here the flatness is relieved by the undulations of the sand-hills, and the monotony of the woods is charmingly broken by numerous clear lakes. These afford considerable variety in size and shape, graduating from the one of three miles long, with irregular and picturesque banks, to the little deep-sunk round basin, its edge clipped into regularity, as though with a huge pair of scissors, by the hand of Nature. In many of them rushes and water-lilies grow thickly for a con-

siderable distance from the bank, which is generally wooded down to the water's edge, except where the pines give place to a belt of palmettos, interspersed with low-growing shrubs. To know how beautiful one of these lakes can look, you must see it at, or immediately after, sunset on a perfectly still evening, with every tree on its banks reflected in its calm depths, and warmed by the crimson and gold of the sky, which will presently pale into delicate opal, and in a short half-hour admit the first stride of the coming darkness.

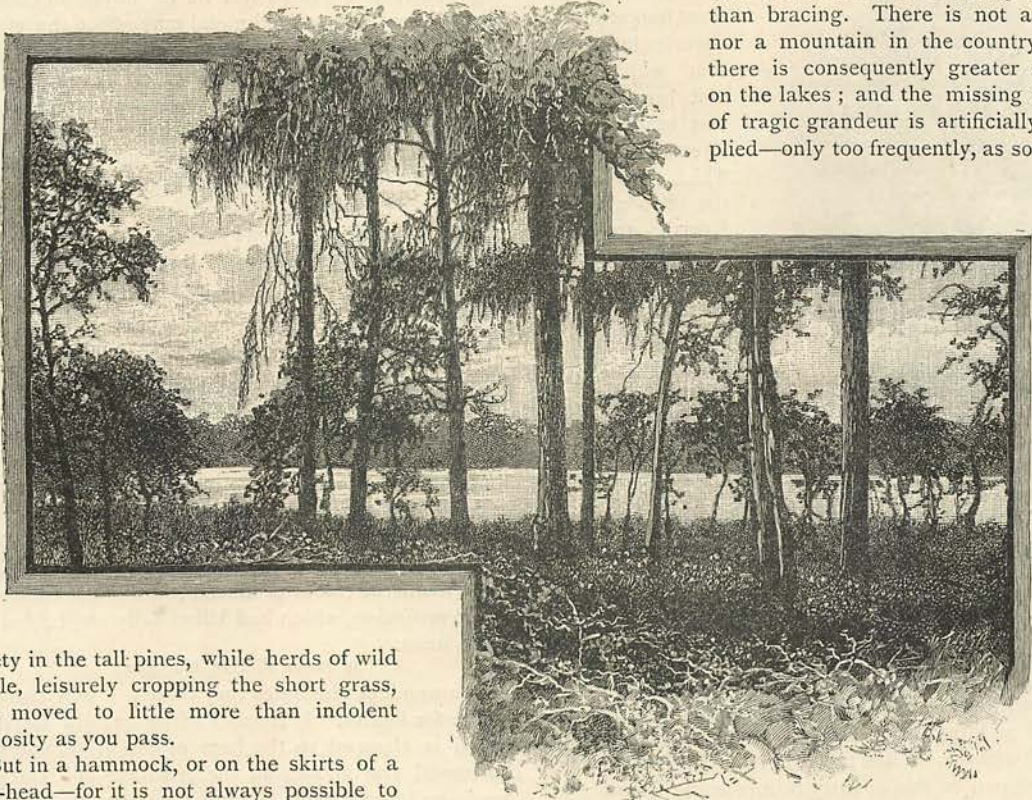
The open woods have an ever-varying carpet of wild flowers, of which the most beautiful looks like a glorified "meadow-sweet," and one of the brightest is wild sage, growing in great profusion, with its flaming little blossoms of red and yellow.

There are tall yellow daisies, that would be the delight and pride of many a fine garden; and in the occasional patches of "muck-land," little delicate white violets—each an embodied poem. Air-plants

and Spanish moss decorate the trees, which are not all pines, several varieties of oak being very common ; and thick bunches of palmettoes are everywhere in evidence. Scarlet-headed woodpeckers fly from tree to tree ; and quail, calling danger-signals to each other in voices of soft caution, scurry past so near that you are more startled than they, and then rise in rapid flight, disappearing before you have recovered from your astonishment at their timid daring. Gophers make for their broad-mouthed holes—fearful pitfalls for the feet of unwary horses—and squirrels seek

huge camp-fire ; choose a spot where live oaks predominate, and where Spanish moss is plentiful, and you will be rewarded by some firelight effects that will almost drive the bay-heads from your mind—at least, for the time being ; and if you make up your mind to pass the night beside that same fire, you will furthermore enjoy such a sunrise as one, seemingly, never *can* enjoy from the windows of a comfortable house.

The seeker after wild and bold scenery will be disappointed in the South Florida Lake district ; for here Nature is at her softest and gentlest, and the scenery, like the climate, is soothing rather than bracing. There is not a rock nor a mountain in the country, but there is consequently greater safety on the lakes ; and the missing touch of tragic grandeur is artificially supplied—only too frequently, as some of



safety in the tall pines, while herds of wild cattle, leisurely cropping the short grass, are moved to little more than indolent curiosity as you pass.

But in a hammock, or on the skirts of a bay-head—for it is not always possible to penetrate into the latter—one becomes inclined to deny any beauty to the open woods, so dull and common-place do they seem in comparison to this almost tropical luxuriance of foliage, these glorious bays, with their exquisite white blossoms (not unlike anemone japonica alba), these tall cabbage-palms, bearing their crests aloft with so grand a dignity, wide-spreading oaks, and beautiful magnolias. Here, where the growth is thickest, is a still more lovely undergrowth ; ferns innumerable cluster around the giant roots, and wild vines creep upward, clinging to the strong branches in graceful profusion. Near by, perhaps, is a little creek, clear and shallow, through which the fishes glide at your feet, as if asking to be caught ; and its jaggy, mossy bank, broken by gnarled roots, and draped with creeping plants, is a spot from which you can hardly tear yourself to wander farther.

Then, if you want to recover your illusions about the open woods, go back and study them by the light of a

“THE FIRST STRIDE OF THE COMING DARKNESS.”

us know, to our cost—by the magnificent spectacle of a forest fire. The woods are constantly burnt off, in order that the cattle which are turned loose in them may have the benefit of the young grass which springs up after the fire ; and much damage is often done on homesteads where the ground outside the fence has not been ploughed to prevent incursions of the devouring element.

Young orange-groves are springing up everywhere ; and new settlers' cottages, mostly small and unpretending, are scattered among the picturesque log huts, hastily put up by the first comers, and as hastily deserted when the means presented themselves of building more comfortable abodes. So much, indeed, may be done to render one of these small dwellings an ideal winter resort, that it is really a pity the true—not the imaginary—advantages of the district are not more widely understood.

M. PENROSE.