

## A WIND STORM IN THE FORESTS OF THE YUBA.

THE mountain winds, like the dew and rain, sunshine and snow, are measured and bestowed with wise love upon the forests, with reference to the development of their highest beauty and well-being. However restricted the scope of other forest influences, that of the winds is universal. The snow bends and trims the upper forests every winter, the lightning strikes a single tree here and there, while avalanches mow down thousands at a single swoop, as a gardener thins out a bed of flowers. But the winds go to every tree; not one is forgotten; the mountain pine, towering with outstretched arms upon the rugged buttresses of the Alps, the lowliest and most retiring tenant of the dells—they seek and find them all, caressing them tenderly, bending them in lusty exercise, stimulating their growth, plucking off a leaf or limb, or removing an entire tree or grove; now whispering and cooing through their branches like a dreamy child, now roaring like the ocean. The wind blessing the forest, the forest the wind, with inef-fable beauty as the sure result.

After one has seen pines six feet in diameter bending like grasses before a mountain gale, and ever and anon some giant falling with a crash that shakes the hills, it seems astonishing that any, save the lowest thick-set trees, could ever have found a period sufficiently stormless to establish themselves; or, once established, that they should not, sooner or later, have been blown down. But when the storm is over, and we behold the same forests tranquil again, towering fresh and unscathed in erect majesty, and consider what centuries of storms have fallen upon them since they were first planted,— hail, to break the tender seedlings; lightning, to scorch and shatter; snow, winds, and avalanches, to crush and overwhelm,— while the manifest result of all this wild storm-culture is the glorious perfection we behold; then faith in Nature's forestry is established, and we cease to deplore the violence of her most destructive gales, or of any other storm-ingredient whatsoever.

There are two trees in the Sierra forests that are never blown down, so long as they continue in sound health. These are the Alpine juniper and the dwarf *Pinus albicaulis* of the summit peaks. Their stiff, crooked roots grip the storm-beaten ledges like eagles' claws, while their lithe, cord-like branches

bend round compliantly, offering but a slight hold for any wind. The other Alpine conifers,—*Pinus aristata*, the mountain pine, the two-leafed pine, and the Williamson spruce,—on account of their admirable toughness and the closeness of their growth, are never thinned out by this agent to any destructive extent. The same is, in general, true of the giants of the lower zones. The kingly sugar-pine towers aloft to a height of more than two hundred feet, offering a fine mark to storm-winds; but it is not densely foliaged, and its long, horizontal arms swing round compliantly in the blast, like tresses of green, fluent algæ in a brook; while the silver firs in most places keep their ranks well together in united strength. The yellow or silver pine is more frequently overturned than any other tree on the Sierra, because its leaves and branches form the largest mass in proportion to its height, while in many places it is planted sparsely, leaving long, open lanes, through which storms may enter with full force. Furthermore, because it is distributed along the lower portion of the range, which was the first to be left bare on the breaking up of the ice-sheet at the close of the glacial winter, the soil it is growing upon has been longer exposed to post-glacial weathering, and consequently is in a more crumbling, decayed condition than the fresher soils farther up the range, and offers a less secure anchorage for the roots.

While exploring the forest zones of Mount Shasta, I discovered the path of a hurricane strewn with thousands of pines of this species. Great and small had been uprooted or wrenched off by sheer force, making a clean gap, like that made by a snow avalanche. But hurricanes capable of doing this class of work are rare in the Sierra, and when we have explored the forest belts from one extremity of the range to the other, we are compelled to believe that they are the most beautiful on the face of the earth, however we may regard the agents that have made them so.

There is always something deeply exciting, not only in the sounds of winds in the woods, which exert more or less influence over every mind, but in their varied water-like flow as manifested by the movements of the trees, especially those of the conifers. By no other are they rendered so extensively and impressively visible, not even by the



A WIND STORM IN THE CALIFORNIA FORESTS. (AFTER A SKETCH BY THE AUTHOR.)

lordly tropic palms or tree-ferns responsive to the gentlest breeze. The waving of a forest of the giant sequoias is indescribably sublime, but the pines seem to me the best interpreters of winds. They are mighty waving golden-rods, ever in tune, singing and writing wind-music all their long century lives. Little, however, of this noble tree-waving and tree-music will you see or hear in the strictly Alpine portion of the forests. The burly juniper, whose girth sometimes more than equals its height, is about as rigid as the rock on which it grows. The slender lash-like sprays of the dwarf-pine stream out in wavering ripples, but the tallest and slenderest are far too unyielding to wave even in the heaviest gales. They only shake in quick, short vibrations. The Williamson-spruce, however, and the mountain-pine, and some of the tallest thickets of the two-leaved species bow in storms with considerable scope and gracefulness. But it is only in the lower and middle zones that the meeting of winds and woods is to be seen in all its grandeur.

One of the most beautiful and exhilarating storms I ever enjoyed occurred in December, 1874, when I happened to be exploring one of the tributary valleys of the Yuba. The sky and the ground and the trees had been thoroughly rain-washed and were dry again. The day was intensely pure, one of those incomparable bits of California winter, warm and balmy and full of white sparkling sunshine, redolent of all the purest influences of the spring, and at the same time enlivened with one of the most cordial wind-storms conceivable. Instead of camping-out as I usually do, I then chanced to be stopping at the house of a friend. But when the storm began to sound, I lost no time in pushing out into the woods to enjoy it. For on such occasions nature has always something rare to show us, and the danger to life and limb is hardly greater than one would experience crouching deprecatingly beneath a roof.

It was still early morning when I found myself fairly adrift. Delicious sunshine came pouring over the hills, lighting the tops of

the pines, and setting free a steam of summery fragrance that contrasted strangely with the wild tones of the storm. The air was mottled with pine-tassels and bright green plumes, that went flashing past in the sunlight like pursued birds. But there was not the slightest dustiness,—nothing less pure than leaves, and ripe pollen, and flecks of withered bracken and moss. Trees were heard falling for hours at the rate of one every two or three minutes; some uprooted, partly on account of the loose, water-soaked condition of the ground; others broken straight across, where some weakness caused by fire had determined the spot. The gestures of the various trees made a delightful study. Young sugar-pines, light and feathery as squirrel-tails, were bowing almost to the ground; while the grand old patriarchs, whose massive boles had been tried in a hundred storms, waved solemnly above them, their long, arching branches streaming fluently on the gale, and every needle thrilling and ringing and shedding off keen lances of light like a diamond. The Douglass spruces, with long sprays drawn out in level tresses, and needles massed in a gray, shimmering glow, presented a most striking appearance as they stood in bold relief along the hill-tops, and so did the madronas in the dells with their red bark and bowed glossy leaves tilted every way, reflecting the sunshine in throbbing spangles like those one so often sees on the rippled surface of a glacier lake. But the silver-pines were now the most impressively beautiful of all. Colossal spires two hundred feet in height waved like supple golden-rods chanting and bowing low as if in worship, while the whole mass of their long, tremulous foliage was kindled into one continuous blaze of white sun-fire.

The force of the gale was such that the most steadfast monarch of them all rocked down to its roots with a motion plainly perceptible when one leaned against it. Nature was holding high festival, and every fiber of the most rigid giants thrilled with glad excitement.

I drifted on through the midst of this passionate music and motion, across many a glen, from ridge to ridge; often halting in the lee of a rock for shelter, or to gaze and listen. Even when the grand anthem had swelled to its highest pitch, I could distinctly hear the varying tones of individual trees—spruce, and fir, and pine, and leafless oak—and even the infinitely gentle rustle of the withered grasses at my feet. Each was ex-

pressing itself in its own way,—singing its own song, and making its own peculiar gestures,—manifesting a richness of variety to be found in no other forest I have yet seen. The coniferous woods of Canada, and the Carolinas, and Florida, are made up of trees that resemble one another about as nearly as blades of grass, and grow close together in much the same way. Coniferous trees, in general, seldom possess individual character, such as is manifest among oaks and elms. But the California forests are made up of a greater number of distinct species than any other in the world. And in them we find, not only a marked differentiation into special groups, but also a marked personality in almost every individual tree, giving rise to storm effects indescribably glorious.

Toward midday, after a long, tingling scramble through copses of hazel and ceanothus, I gained the summit of the highest ridge in the neighborhood; and then it occurred to me that it would be a fine thing to climb one of the trees to obtain a wider outlook and get my ear close to the Æolian music of its topmost needles. But under the circumstances the choice of a tree was a serious matter. One whose instep was not very strong seemed in danger of being blown down, or of being struck by others in case they should fall; another was branchless to a considerable height above the ground, and at the same time too large to be grasped with arms and legs in climbing; while others were not favorably situated for clear views. After thus cautiously casting about, I made choice of the tallest of a group of Douglass spruces that were growing close together like a tuft of grass, no one of which seemed likely to fall unless all the rest fell with it. Though comparatively young, they were about a hundred feet high, and their lithe, brushy tops were rocking and swirling in wild ecstasy. Being accustomed to climb trees in making botanical studies, I experienced no difficulty in reaching the top of this one, and never before did I enjoy so noble an exhilaration of motion. The slender tops fairly flapped and swished in the passionate torrent, bending and swirling backward and forward, round and round, tracing indescribable combinations of vertical and horizontal curves, while I clung with muscles firm braced, like a bobolink on a reed.

In its widest sweeps my tree-top described an arc of from twenty to thirty degrees, but I felt sure of its elastic temper, having

seen others of the same species still more severely tried,—bent almost to the ground indeed, in heavy snows without breaking a fiber. I was therefore safe and free to take the wind into my pulses and enjoy the excited forest from my grand outlook. The view from here must be extremely beautiful in any weather. Now my eye roved over the piney hills and dales as over fields of waving grain, and felt the light running in ripples and broad swelling undulations across the valleys from ridge to ridge, as the shining foliage was stirred by corresponding waves of air. Oftentimes these waves of reflected light would break up suddenly into a kind of beaten foam, and again, after chasing one another in regular order, they would seem to bend forward in concentric curves, and disappear on some hill-side, like sea-waves on a shelving shore. The quantity of light reflected from the bent needles was so great as to make whole groves appear as if covered with snow, while the black shadows beneath the trees greatly enhanced the effect of the silvery splendor.

Excepting only the shadows there was nothing somber in all this wild sea of pines. On the contrary, notwithstanding this was the winter season, the colors were remarkably beautiful. The shafts of the pine and libocedrus were brown and purple, and most of the foliage was well tinged with yellow, and the laurel groves, with the pale undersides of their leaves turned upward, made masses of gray; and then there was many a dash of chocolate color from clumps of manzanita, and jet of vivid crimson from the bark of the madronas, while the ground on the hill-sides, appearing here and there through openings between the groves, displayed masses of pale purple and brown.

The sounds of the storm corresponded gloriously with this wild exuberance of light and motion. The profound bass of the naked branches and boles booming like water-falls; the quick, tense vibrations of the pine needles, now rising to a shrill, whistling hiss, now falling to a silky murmur; the rustling of laurel groves in the dells, and the keen metallic click of leaf on leaf—all heard in easy analysis when the attention was calmly bent.

The varied gestures of the multitude were seen to fine advantage, so that one could recognize the different species at a distance of several miles by this means alone, as well as by their forms and colors, and the way they reflected the light. All

seemed strong and comfortable, as if really enjoying the storm, while responding to its most enthusiastic greetings. We hear much nowadays concerning the universal struggle for existence, but no struggle in the common meaning of the word was manifest here; no recognition of danger by any tree, no deprecation; but rather an invincible gladness as remote from exultation as from fear.

I kept my lofty perch for hours, frequently closing my eyes to enjoy the music by itself, or to feast quietly on the delicious fragrance that was streaming past. It was less marked than that produced during warm rain, when so many balsamic buds and leaves are steeped like tea; but, from the chafing of rosin branches against one another, and the incessant attrition of myriads of needles, the gale was spiced to a very tonic degree. And besides the fragrance from these local sources there were traces of scents brought from afar. For this wind came first from the sea, rubbing against its fresh, briny waves; then distilled through the redwoods, threading rich ferny gulches, and spreading itself in broad undulating currents over many a flower-enameled ridge of the coast; then across the golden plains, up the purple foot-hills, and into these piney woods with the varied incense gathered by the way.

Winds are advertisements of all they touch, however much or little we may be able to read them; telling their wanderings even by their scents alone. Mariners detect the flowery perfume of land-winds far at sea, and sea-winds carry the fragrance of dulse and tangle far inland, where it is quickly recognized, though mingled with the scents of a thousand land-flowers. As an illustration of this, I might tell here that I breathed sea-air on the Frith of Forth, in Scotland, while a boy; then was taken inland to Wisconsin, where I remained nineteen years; then, without in all this time having breathed one breath of the sea, I walked quietly, alone, from the middle of the Mississippi Valley to the Gulf of Mexico, on a botanical excursion, and while in Florida, far from the coast, my attention wholly bent on the splendid tropical vegetation, I suddenly recognized a sea-breeze, as it came sifting through the palmettoes and blooming vine tangles, which at once awakened and set free a thousand dormant associations, and made me a boy in Scotland again, as if all the intervening years were annihilated.

Most people like to look at mountain rivers, and bear them in mind; but few care to look at the winds, though far more beautiful

and sublime, and though they become at times about as visible as flowing water. When the north winds in winter are making upward sweeps over the curving summits of the Alps, the fact is sometimes published with flying banners half a mile long. Those portions of the winds thus embodied can scarce be wholly invisible, even to the darkest imagination. And when we look around over an agitated forest, we may see something of the wind that stirs it, by its effects upon the trees. Yonder it descends in a rush of water-like ripples, and sweeps over the bending trees from hill to hill. Nearer, we see detached plumes and leaves, now speeding by on level currents, now whirled in eddies, or, escaping over the edges of the whirls, carried rapidly aloft on grand, upswelling domes of air, or tossed on flame-like crests, smooth, deep currents, cascades, falls, and swirling eddies, singing around every tree and leaf, and over all the varied topography of the region with telling changes of form, like mountain rivers conforming to the features of their channels.

After tracing the Sierra streams from their fountains to the plains, marking where they bloom white in falls, glide in crystal plumes, surge gray and foam-filled in boulder-choked gorges, and slip through the woods in long, tranquil reaches—after thus

learning their language and forms in detail, we may at length hear them chanting all together in one grand anthem, and comprehend them all in clear inner vision, covering the range like lace. But even this glorious spectacle is far less sublime and not a whit more substantial than what we may behold of these storm-streams of air in the woods.

We all travel the milky way together, trees and men; but it never occurred to me until this storm-day, while swinging in the wind, that trees are travelers, in the ordinary sense. They make many journeys, not very extensive ones, it is true; but our own little comes and goes are only little more than tree-wavings—many of them not so much.

When the storm began to abate, I dismounted and sauntered down through the calming woods. The storm-tones died away, and, turning toward the east, I beheld the countless hosts of the forests hushed and tranquil, towering above one another on the slopes of the hills like a devout audience. The setting sun filled them with amber light, and seemed to say, while they listened, "My peace I give unto you."

As I gazed on the impressive scene, all the so-called ruin of the storm was forgotten, and never before did these noble woods appear so fresh, so joyous, so immortal.

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## A MODERN PLAYWRIGHT.

(EUGÈNE SCRIBE.)

RECLINING on a soft seat, relieved from the fatigue of holding a book and turning its leaves, the attention allured to steadiness by a thousand syrens (lights, music, brilliant costumes, beautiful scenery, splendid hall filled with well-dressed people), which, with roses, pelt away after-dinner torpor; the nerves excited by the influence of the audience, of which one is both part and slave; sharing their mirth and their sorrow, their admiration and their horror; spared intellectual fatigue by all sorts of ingenious devices,—minute descriptions and long narrations suppressed,—the inflections of the actors' voices, the play of their countenances, their expressive gestures, flooding the meager text with a most luminous commentary which leaves no thought, not even those rather hinted than expressed, obscure,—the lazy people who are too indo-

lent to read even a story, find theatrical performances *their* entertainments. Plays are to books what *consommés* and *purées* are to meat and vegetables.

No men ever possessed greater mastery in this delicate, difficult and wonderful art than the celebrated playwright, Eugène Scribe.

Really I cannot call Scribe a playwright. He was a great deal more and a great deal better than that. I know it is the fashion to laugh at him; to denounce him as ignorant of the art of writing, to upbraid him for having left a fortune when he might have left masterpieces; I cannot join this chorus. It is ridiculous to pretend that Scribe could not write. It might as well be said that scene-painters cannot paint because their canvas, placed in daylight side by side with some great fresco, seems mere daubing. Their canvas was not