



First Summer

How I Happened to Go to the Mountains

EARLY IN the year 1865, the proprietors of the Profile House, in the Franconia Mountains, finding repairs and additions necessary to their hotel, advertised for a large gang of workmen.

I received a pressing invitation to go up and work. The wages were good, and expenses paid both ways.

I hesitated—there was work enough at home; I had never been out of work a single day, having always been sought for to do all kinds of work both in and out of town. I was acknowledged to be a skillful and steady workman. I hesitated, also, because my family and myself had been thrown into deep mourning by the recent death, from diphtheria, of two of our children, our only boy and a girl; but after a few days of reflection and consultation with my family, I decided to go.

I may as well say here, that, while the wages offered were very acceptable, they had not so much to do with my decision as had a desire to see a place of which I had heard so much, and an idea that there would be some chance to gratify my love of adventure.

Of adventure I subsequently had a good deal, as will be shown in the course of my story.

I notified several persons, who were waiting for me to do some work for them, that they must find some one else to do it, as I must go. They told me that they would wait until my

ADVENTURES OF A DEAF-MUTE

return; and, bidding my family good-by, I was whirled away over the iron track.

At Concord, N.H., while waiting for the train from Boston, I noticed a strange-looking old man in the depot. His hair and beard were long and white, giving him a very patriarchal look.

The day was very cold, but he wore a straw hat and thin summer clothes, and his neck and feet were bare. He walked about with great activity, taking snuff frequently from a bladder, which served him instead of a box. He looked sharply at everyone, and spoke to me once; but when I put a finger to my ear and shook my head, he walked away. I wondered who and what he was, and inclined to think him either insane or very odd. I have since seen him going about the streets of Concord barefooted, and dressed in thin clothes, when the snow lay a foot deep on the ground.

His name is Flag; he lives in a log cabin at Pembroke, about fifteen miles from Concord. He professes to be a water-cure doctor, and is about seventy-five years old.

Speculation in the various forms in which human nature crops out, helped me to pass away the time till the train came along.

Before reaching Lake Village, the train stopped at a small station for a supply of wood and water. Here a very ragged and dirty little boy annoyed the passengers by passing up and down in the cars. Meeting the conductor, a large and powerful man, he pushed past him and would have gone out, but the conductor seized him and actually threw him out of a window upon a wood-car that was slowly moving in an opposite direction. This little incident made every one roar with laughter. The boy was not hurt, though he was probably somewhat frightened.

After passing Lake Village, I caught my first glimpse of the peak of Mount Washington, the highest of all the White Mountains. Its summit was wrapped in snow, and its sublime appearance gave me much food for thought.

FIRST SUMMER

As we rode along, I caught occasional glimpses of sheets of water, and at last the broad and beautiful Lake Winnipiseogee lay before me. I no longer wondered at the name given it by the Indians, if, as some say, it means "The Smile of the Great Spirit." It has been called the "Loch Lomond" of America.

Loch Lomond is a lake in Scotland, famous for its beauty, but it is generally admitted, by those who have seen both, that Winnipiseogee is the most beautiful of the two.

The late Hon. Edward Everett, speaking of a visit to this lake, said: "I have been something of a traveller in our own country—though not so much as I could wish—and in Europe have seen all that is most attractive, from the Highlands of Scotland to the Golden Horn of Constantinople—from the summit of the Hartz Mountains to the Fountain of Vaucluse; but my eye has yet to rest on a lovelier scene than that which smiles around you as you sail from Weir's Landing to Centre Harbor."

At the Pemigewasset House, in Plymouth, where the train stopped for dinner, I met that prince of good fellows, Hiram Bell, Esq., the landlord of the hotel; formerly the well-known and popular landlord of the Profile House. It was to him that I was indebted for the invitation to go and work in the Mountains.

The deaf-mutes who composed the party which visited the Profile House and went up Mount Lafayette, in 1858, will remember Mr. Bell as a liberal-hearted man and a genial friend. I shall elsewhere give an account of the adventures of this party, in connection with my own.

As the train neared Well's River, I was standing at the car door, looking out, and saw one of the car wheels fly off and roll down the bank. The next instant there was a terrible jarring; the stove-pipe was shaken out, and the passengers were thrown into confusion. I could hardly keep my feet, and concluded that I should be killed.

ADVENTURES OF A DEAF-MUTE

Some one gave the signal to “brake up” by pulling the cord that ran through the train, and it was stopped without accident. After this we moved slowly to the next stopping-place, where the damaged car was removed and the train sped on.

In due time I reached Littleton, from which place are stages to all parts of the Mountains. I was so anxious to secure a seat on the top of the stage, that I climbed upon it first and gave orders about my baggage afterwards.

Our six stout horses carried us along at a good rate; on the way, I had a fine view of the Mountains. One of the passengers pointed out Mount Lafayette to me. The day was clear, and I could see that snow was falling on the mountain-top, while below it was the vast, black ravine in which I afterwards nearly lost my life, of which I tell in the proper place.

After passing Franconia, noted for its iron mine, and as being one of the coldest places in the country, we saw a snow-storm coming down upon us, and for a few moments it completely enveloped and blinded us; when it cleared away, Mount Lafayette looked more majestic than before, in its mantle of white.

All symptoms of life, except ourselves, soon disappeared, and for some miles the road was through a gloomy forest, and at the end of this we arrived at the Profile House.

Few of us having been prepared for the storm and cold, the fire and a hot supper were very welcome indeed.

My signs and gestures, and my little slate, of which I made free use in talking with my companions, soon attracted the attention of the company, to most of whom a deaf-mute was evidently a new thing. One man in particular, an Irishman, who was seated in a corner smoking a pipe, after eyeing me intently for some time, approached me, laid a hand on my shoulder, looked me in the face, and then, making the sign of the cross, he nodded, went back to his seat, and resumed his pipe, ap-

FIRST SUMMER

parently satisfied that it was all right. I could not help smiling at his behavior, and did not know what to think of it; but have since concluded that it was his way of either getting acquainted or of expressing sympathy.

I retired to bed but could not sleep; my new situation and my own thoughts kept me awake. I could feel the house shake from the action of the wind, which was blowing hard, and, gathering extraordinary strength from compression in its passage through the Notch, struck with great force upon the hotel, which, although a very large building, shook like a person with the ague.

In the morning I was quite sick, having caught a bad cold in my ride from Littleton. After breakfast I felt better and took a walk; the mountains, trees, rocks, and everything were covered with ice—the effect of the frost-clouds during the night—and in the rays of the rising sun everything glittered and glowed with all the colors of the rainbow. It was a magnificent sight; I thought of the fairy scenes in the “Arabian Nights.”

The scene increased in beauty as the sun rose higher, till the frostwork began to dissolve in the warmth, and in a short time everything had returned to its usual dark and somber hue.

My next thought was to visit the “Great Stone Face,” “The Old Man of the Mountain.”

“The Old Man of the Mountain”

I had heard much of this great natural curiosity; and had thought that there must be *some* resemblance to a human profile, but I was not prepared for the “accurate chiselling and astonishing sculpture” which now met my eyes.

The “Profile” has “a stern, projecting, massive brow, which looks as if it contained the thought and wisdom of centuries.” The nose is “straight, and finely cut.” The lips are thin, and slightly parted, as if about to speak. The chin is “well thrown

ADVENTURES OF A DEAF-MUTE

forward, and shows the hard, obstinate character of the 'Old Man,' who has faced the storms of ages with such unmoving steadiness."

As I stood there and looked at the towering cliff on which the "Old Man" is situated, all my appreciation of the grand and sublime in nature was awakened; and, mingled with other thoughts came longings for a closer acquaintance with the "Old Man" and dreams of "doing and daring" in those wild regions as none had ever done before.

To the general observer, who sees the "Old Man" against a clear sky, the expression is one of earnest expectation, mingled with that "heart-sickness produced by hope long deferred." But the expression varies with the weather. Sometimes it appears on the point of giving utterance to speech; sometimes it wears a settled scowl, and at others a look of more than mortal sadness.

Clouds passing under the chin or above and around the forehead materially soften the expression, and, by bearding and wiggling the face, make it very lifelike. The best time to see it is in the afternoon, when the sun is behind it. After a cold rain, I have seen the "Old Man's" face glisten beautifully, and wear a smiling look.

During the four seasons which I have spent at the "Profile House," I have studied the "Old Man" in all its aspects as seen from below. It had a fascination for me which drew me to it in storm and in calm, by day and by night, in season and out of season. It was a strange and unaccountable influence and an irresistible impulse.

Often as I have looked upon the "Old Man," both far and near, I am not satisfied; it still has the old attraction for me, and I hope to continue my researches in the vicinity.

Returning to the hotel, I spent the rest of the day in looking out of the windows upon the grand scenery with which it is surrounded, and in recalling to mind the mountain adventures

FIRST SUMMER

and narrow escapes of which I had read, and trying to remember how the persons concerned acted, in order to escape the danger they were in.

I always had a love of adventure, but made it a rule "never to get into danger until I had planned how to get out of it"; and I think it very important and useful for people to study and remember *how to act* in case of exposure to any kind of danger. If this were more generally practised, there would be much less loss of life. A person with presence of mind has an immense advantage in case of accidents, and is worth a hundred who are wild and distracted. Knowledge how to act has saved my own life and limbs several times.

The next day I was able to go to work, and was much amused by the whisperings and pointings of my fellow-workmen. They regarded me, for some time, as a strange person, and seemed to be much afraid of my slate and pencil. One of them, who stood near me one day when I pulled out my slate for some purpose, ran away as fast as possible, showing fear on his face; but whether in fun or earnest I did not know, nor did I care, so long as there was nothing offensive in the manner. In course of time they got over this, and treated me as one of themselves.

The Bowling Alley at the foot of Cannon Mountain, so called, had been entirely destroyed, and we were ordered to rebuild it. It was destroyed in the following manner:

It snowed for half a day, then a cold rain followed, which froze solid; then fell a foot of snow, and the next day was so warm that the snow melted, and not being absorbed by the frozen ground, ran down the mountain into the valley. Gulches and ravines were quickly flooded; brooks became rivers, and cascades grew to cataracts. Behind the alley ran a small brook, which, overflowing its banks, undermined it and swept it away. The hotel grounds were flooded, all the cellars filled with water, and much damage was done. After finishing

ADVENTURES OF A DEAF-MUTE

the alley, we were put to shingling the Profile House, the size of which may be imagined from its taking eight men twelve days to finish the front side only, and on that alone they used fifty thousand feet of shingles.

Snow-balling in June

One warm day in June, I made one of a party of eight persons which ascended Cannon Mountain in search of quartz crystals, the distance being about a mile and a half.

It was my first experience in climbing mountains, and I was soon very tired. The path had been damaged by the spring freshets, and the ascent, hard at any time, was then unusually so.

The day was fine, but just as we reached the top of the mountain we were enveloped in clouds, and could neither go for the crystals or enjoy the fine view which can be had in clear weather.

We were obliged cautiously to retrace our steps lest we should lose our way. I was much disappointed, but comforted myself by the reflection that I could come again.

As we were descending, we saw, a short distance to one side of the path, a patch of snow, about an acre in extent and a foot deep, so situated in a hollow that the sun never shone upon it. We left the path and went toward it: while looking around, some one proposed a little fun. With the feelings of younger days, the members of the party, whose ages ranged from thirty-five to sixty, divided into equal bodies and took up positions, the agreement being to pelt each other until one party should be driven from the snow.

The snow was soft, and easily worked, and the snow-balls flew fast and furious for more than an hour, when the party to which I belonged were driven from the field by a skilful movement of the other party, under the lead of an old gentleman of sixty, whose tactics would have been useful on a more earnest

FIRST SUMMER

battle-field, and obliged to surrender. The severe exercise had stirred our blood and put us in good humor, doing much to compensate us for the loss of our original object in coming up the Mountain; and we resumed our homeward way, well pleased with the novel and uncommon incident of making and using snow-balls in summer.

At Work in the "Flume"

I went one day with a gang of workmen to repair the bridge over the Pemigewasset River, and the footways by which visitors reach the "Flume." The storms and freshets of winter always do more or less damage to the bridges, foot-paths, plank-walks, and other contrivances for the convenience, comfort and safety of the summer visitor, which are not removed at the close of the travelling season.

I will try to give those who have not seen it some idea of this great natural curiosity.

The "Flume" is reached from the bridge across the river, by a foot-path which follows the course of the stream, crossing it often, leading up and over steep rocks, and sometimes following the bed of the stream itself. At every step something is seen to admire.

The stream pours itself through the "Flume" over an inclined plane of smooth, polished rock, six hundred feet in length, and very gradual in descent. Precipices from sixty to eighty feet high wall in the waters on each side; the space between them averages about twenty feet, except at the upper end, where the walls suddenly approach each other within ten feet, and hold suspended between them, in mid-air, an enormous boulder of granite, which looks as if a very small force would send it into the stream below, so slight appears its hold between the cliffs. The precipices on each side are fringed with tall forest trees, and the sun shines into the ravine only about two hours a day. It is at all times a grand and gloomy scene.

ADVENTURES OF A DEAF-MUTE

The only way to get up this narrow gorge is by a foot-way of planks and logs which is kept in repair by the proprietors.

A huge tree has fallen across from one side to the other, above the boulder, and many persons have crossed the ravine on it. It is a dizzy height, and the foothold is not very secure, the log being rotten and slippery.

Having repaired the bridge, we proceeded to the "Flume" to fix up the foot-ways. We there found an army of small black flies, or midgets, as they are called. These troublesome little insects, which are far worse than mosquitoes, abound in the woods and all over the mountains, and annoy every one with merciless perseverance. They seldom show themselves in the houses, and will keep away from a person who is smoking. All workmen outside are obliged to make a fire and keep up a smoke, in order to be able to work. We built a huge fire at one end of the "Flume," and thus kept the flies away; a gust of wind would sometimes drive so much smoke in upon us as to compel us to drop our tools, and run out to avoid suffocation. This hindered us a good deal, but we preferred to be smoked out occasionally rather than to bear the constant torment of the flies.

The logs on which the plank foot-ways of the previous summer had rested having been washed away, it was necessary for us to cut down some trees for new ones; in order to procure what we needed, we ascended a narrow path to the top of one side of the ravine, and, cutting down the trees, we trimmed them and rolled them over the brink into the chasm below.

Looking over to the opposite side of the ravine, I saw a tall tree standing on the edge of the precipice, and determined to go across and fell it; I wished to see it fall into the "Flume" with all its branches on. Taking my axe, I started over the log I have spoken of as lying across the chasm; I had nearly reached the other side when my foot struck a projecting knot, I lost my balance, and what saved me from falling was a desperate

FIRST SUMMER

spring, and my grasp on a bush which grew near the edge. I was startled, and it was some time before I could go to work; at last I began to cut down the tree, which soon began to reel, and the breeze taking it on the right side, it slowly inclined in the desired direction; I ran to a safe distance, and leaned over the edge as far as I dared, with one hand grasping the branch of a tree, to see it fall. It went down head-foremost, and was, to my surprise, considerably shorter than the depth of the ravine; it struck on its head, stood upright for an instant, as if surprised at its novel situation, and then its heavy butt-end went down on the bed of the stream with a crash like that of a thousand thunders. The earth shook and trembled beneath my feet, and the sensations I then experienced will never be forgotten.

I felled two more trees, but not with the same success, and, we having enough for the footways, I looked about for a way to the bottom of the ravine. The log by which I had crossed was still open to me, and a path was on the other side; but as I did not wish to trust the log again, I finally scrambled down the steep side of the precipice, and reached the bottom with only a few trifling bruises and scratches. We were obliged to work, much of the time, in three or four feet of water, which was cold as ice, and were very glad when the job was finished.

Almost an Accident

Early on the morning of the Fourth of July, the mulatto hostler of the Profile House brought a small cannon, or swivel, into the front yard. It had been used, the previous summer, for the entertainment of the guests who wished to hear the echoes waked by its discharge on the shore of Echo Lake, and had become rusty by long exposure to the weather. The mulatto filled the cannon nearly full of fine sporting gunpowder, grass and dirt, rammed it down as hard as possible, and then, lighting a match, attempted to discharge it; failing to do so, he gave it up for the present, and left the cannon in the yard. Another

ADVENTURES OF A DEAF-MUTE

man came along, discovered how the cannon was loaded, and removed it to the back side of the hotel. Having reached a distance which he considered safe, he inserted a fuse in the priming, lit it, and ran away. The cannon burst; and a piece of iron weighing twenty pounds went over the Profile House and buried itself in the front yard, less than four feet from one of the guests who was walking there. It was very fortunate that the mulatto did not succeed in discharging the cannon; he would have been torn in pieces, and much other damage would have been done.

My First Visit to the "Old Man"

About the last of July I determined to pay a visit to the head of the "Old Man." While getting ready for the attempt, I thought, if I got there, I would set up a pole and raise a flag; I also concluded to remain on the top of the Mountain until after dark, and then build a large bonfire. I procured a hatchet, which I always thereafter carried in my belt in all my wanderings, a flag ten feet long and five feet wide, a long cord, a bag of shavings, and kindling-wood and some provisions; altogether they made a heavy load to carry to the top of the Mountain, a mile and a half, on a hot day in summer.

At one o'clock, P.M., I left the Profile House, and commenced the ascent of Cannon Mountain, so called from there being, near its top, a rock, which, seen from a certain point, resembles a cannon mounted on a carriage; it is also called Profile Mountain, as it is on its side that the "Old Man" is situated.

I followed the footpath, and found it very hard work to get along with my load, but reached the top, and deposited it in a convenient place for use at the proper time. After resting a little, I began to descend toward the "Old Man," which lies about a mile away in an opposite direction from that in which I ascended. The way was far more difficult than I had supposed; huge rocks were scattered around, among and over which I

FIRST SUMMER

had to carefully choose my way. Long before I saw any signs of the "Old Man," I was much inclined to give it up; but I remembered that some one had been on the Head before, and that "what man has done, man may do."

I might not be, and probably was not, following the route taken by the other party, but any way to the Head must be hard and dangerous; so I pushed on, and was finally rewarded, as I supposed, by arriving at the spot I wished to find. Looking about for a flag-staff, I saw that the nearest wood was half a mile farther down, and that much of the way to it lay along the brink of a frightful precipice. The descent required great care; for in some places a slip of the foot would send me to be dashed in pieces on the rocks more than a thousand feet below, and a false step anywhere would be a serious thing. I finally reached the wood, and selected a fine stick, fifteen feet long, and five inches in diameter at the larger end, which I trimmed with my hatchet, and succeeded, after immense labor, in transporting to what seemed to be the right place. From the spot where I stood I could see the lake at the foot of the Mountain, and many people on the shore. I had told no one of my intentions when I left the hotel, and now began to regret it, as, if anything prevented me from getting back, nobody would know where to look for me, and the consequences might not be pleasant. However, by getting on a large rock and waving the flag, I attracted the attention of the people, who waved hats and handkerchiefs to show that they saw me. I now felt easier in my mind, as, if I was missed, my location would readily be inferred.

Raising the pole, I placed it in a cleft in a rock, piling large stones around it to secure it, and then flung the flag to the breeze.

I saw it was getting late and I made the best of my way back to the place where I had left my load. The descent was hard, as I have said, but the return was worse, and I was nearly

ADVENTURES OF A DEAF-MUTE

exhausted before reaching the top. Selecting a good place near the "Cannon," I spent the next two hours in collecting wood, brush, and green spruce-trees; at the end of that time I had a very large pile under which I arranged the kindlings, and sat down to wait for the proper time to set the pile on fire. I determined to wait until nine o'clock, because many of the guests would then be in the piazza of the hotel, and also because the stages usually arrived about that time. It now occurred to me that I had not taken time to consider the enterprise carefully, in all its bearings, before starting.

There was no moon; I had omitted to bring a lantern, and I might find it difficult to get back, if I was obliged to stay out all night. To miss the path would be dangerous in the extreme, and to keep it in the darkness would be difficult. I might meet with the same mishap as that which happened in the year 1859 to Charles Barrett, a wealthy deaf-mute of Boston, now dead. He was one of a party of deaf-mutes who had been attending a Convention in Vermont, and were now visiting the Profile House. Most of them had made the ascent of Mount Lafayette, and they were seated around the fire after supper, enjoying themselves, when one of them suddenly asked what became of Mr. Barrett, who had not accompanied them up the Mountain. None of them had seen him since their return. Investigation proved that he was not about the hotel, but one of the servants remembered having seen him going up the path leading to the top of Cannon Mountain, and that he was alone. This caused instant alarm, and men were dispatched up the Mountain, with lanterns, to hunt for him. As the search progressed, his hat, cravat, coat, etc., were found in various places. He was finally found far out of the regular path, wandering aimlessly and distractedly about, and most completely lost. Before him, and directly in his way, was a steep precipice, and in all probability a few minutes' delay would have proved fatal. When he found that he was saved, his strength, which was nearly exhausted,

FIRST SUMMER

gave way entirely, and he became unconscious. It was necessary to carry him most of the way back to the hotel, where a liberal use of restorative soon put him all right.

Having thought it all over, I concluded to carry out my original plan, and proceeded to eat my luncheon as a beginning. The wind in this elevated spot blew quite hard, and I felt chilly as my clothing was damp with perspiration. Finding a cleft in a rock which would protect me from the wind, I crept into it and remained two hours; the large bag in which I had brought the shavings served me as a shawl, and I was quite comfortable in body, although still somewhat uneasy in mind about getting down.

All was utter silence around me; the rapidly-increasing darkness, and the distance back, were not pleasant subjects for thought.

I was indeed, for the time, "monarch of all I surveyed"; but if my realm was limited by my vision, it was small indeed, and my crown by no means sat lightly on my brow. My watch finally told me, by the aid of a match, that it was nine o'clock, and I fired the pile; the wind fanned the flame to a huge blaze thirty feet or more in height, which illuminated the scene for miles around, and was quickly seen from the hotel. They told me afterwards that a cry of "fire" was raised, and every one of the three hundred and fifty persons then at the hotel was outside in a very few minutes, and enjoyed the scene very much. In about half an hour the fire died away; as soon as my eyes, which had been blinded by the blaze, became accustomed to the darkness, I set out to return; I could barely see to keep the path, and stumbled and fell quite often.

After a long and tedious journey, I arrived at the Profile House with no other damage than a bruised knee. The next morning inquiry was made about the fire, and a desire was expressed to see the person who made it; I was sent for and presented to the company, who, on being acquainted with the

ADVENTURES OF A DEAF-MUTE

facts, made up a handsome contribution for me. The contribution was very welcome, I am free to say; but I do not think that I would do the same job over again for the same amount. A man will sometimes do a thing for his own gratification which he cannot afterward be hired to do at any price.

Going down to the lake, I was surprised to find that the pole was not on the Head, but some distance from it, among a group of rocks called "Adam's Apple." Not content to leave the job half done, I jumped into a boat, rowed across the lake, and struck off and up through the pathless woods to the pole, which I planted in another place. The Head was a very difficult and dangerous place to move or stand on. Returning to the lake, I found that the pole was in the right place.

In a few days, work was discontinued on the hotel, as the proprietors were obliged to give all their time to the rapidly-increasing number of guests, and I was dismissed, with orders to return after the travelling season was over. And so ended my first summer at the Mountains.