

RIVERS

By Walter Prichard Eaton

ILLUSTRATIONS BY WALTER KING STONE

IF you desire an argument for idealism, said Emerson, stoop down and look at a familiar landscape through your legs. (This, it will be recalled, was also Peter

Pan's method for intimidating the wolves!) Yet Emerson need hardly have resorted to so gymnastic a feat for casting over a familiar landscape the sense of strangeness. There flows through the Concord meadows, and 'neath "the rude bridge" which spans its flood, the Concord River, incomparable for canoes, and from the seat of a gently moving craft on its dark, quiet waters you may see all that fair New England countryside through the transforming lens of an unaccustomed

view-point—the view-point, as it were, of the floor of the world.

If you walk with the shade of old Izaak Walton by the bank of a river, in quiet contemplation or busy with a rod, you may fall in love with life and flowing streams, but you will not know the true river view. You will know that only from a boat, preferably a noiseless, smooth-slipping canoe,

because only from the boat is your level of vision altered from the habitual, lowered till all the common objects of the landscape shift their values and the world is indeed so

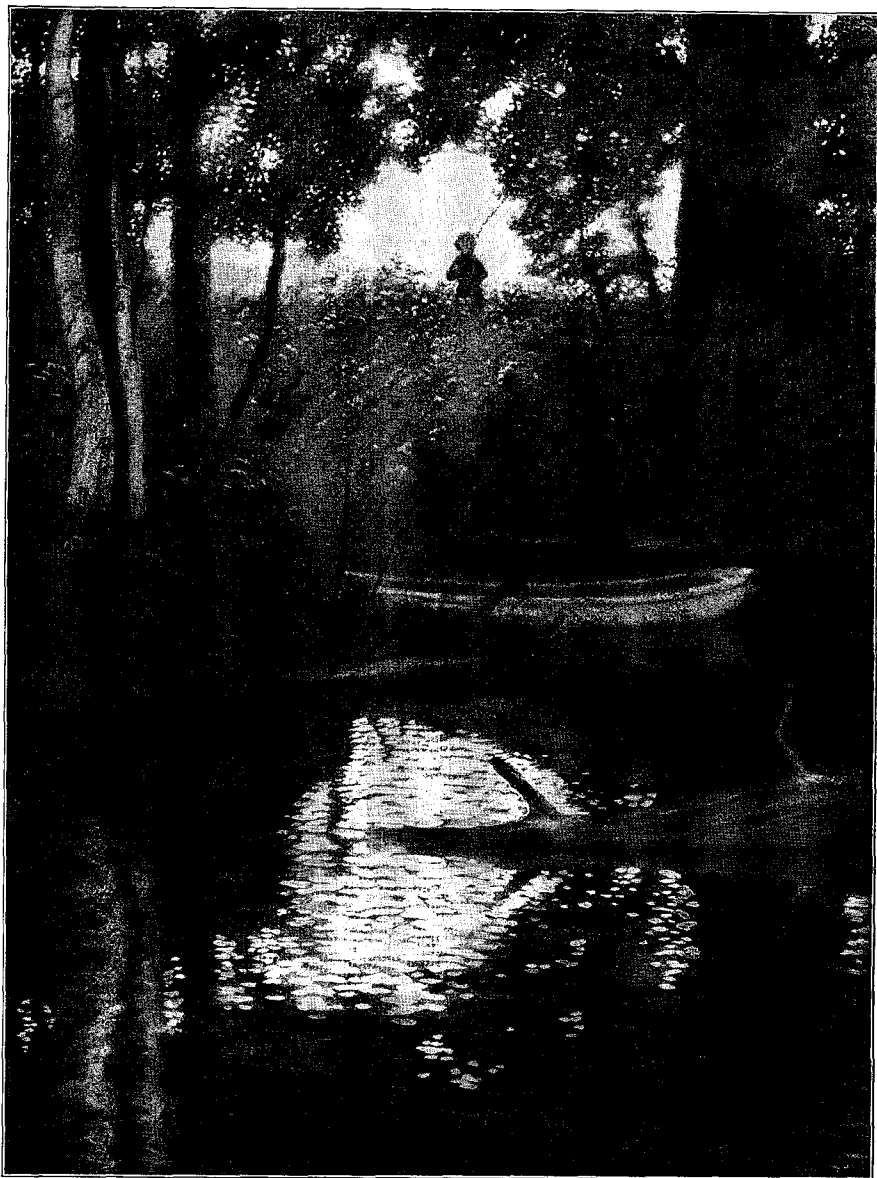
strange a place that you realize, as Emerson intended, how many of our so-called facts are merely habits of the human eye. We have often suspected that Bishop Berkeley himself was a traveller by inland water-ways, and drew his philosophy from the river view.

Did you ever lie stretched on your garden path, shutting the eye farther from the ground and squinting with the other through the strange jungle of your flower beds? The sensation is curious, almost disconcerting.

The pebbles on the path cast long shadows, the bordering grasses are tall, and the stalks of your daffodils tower like a pine wood, while the sun shines through amid the translucent green trunks, bringing down a shimmer of golden blooms. See, a robin hops into the picture! You know him for a robin by his rosy breast and his brittle legs. But how huge he is! You are scarce aware of the



I watched the thread of crystal water slip through the mosses into the depths of a mountain ravine.—Page 35.

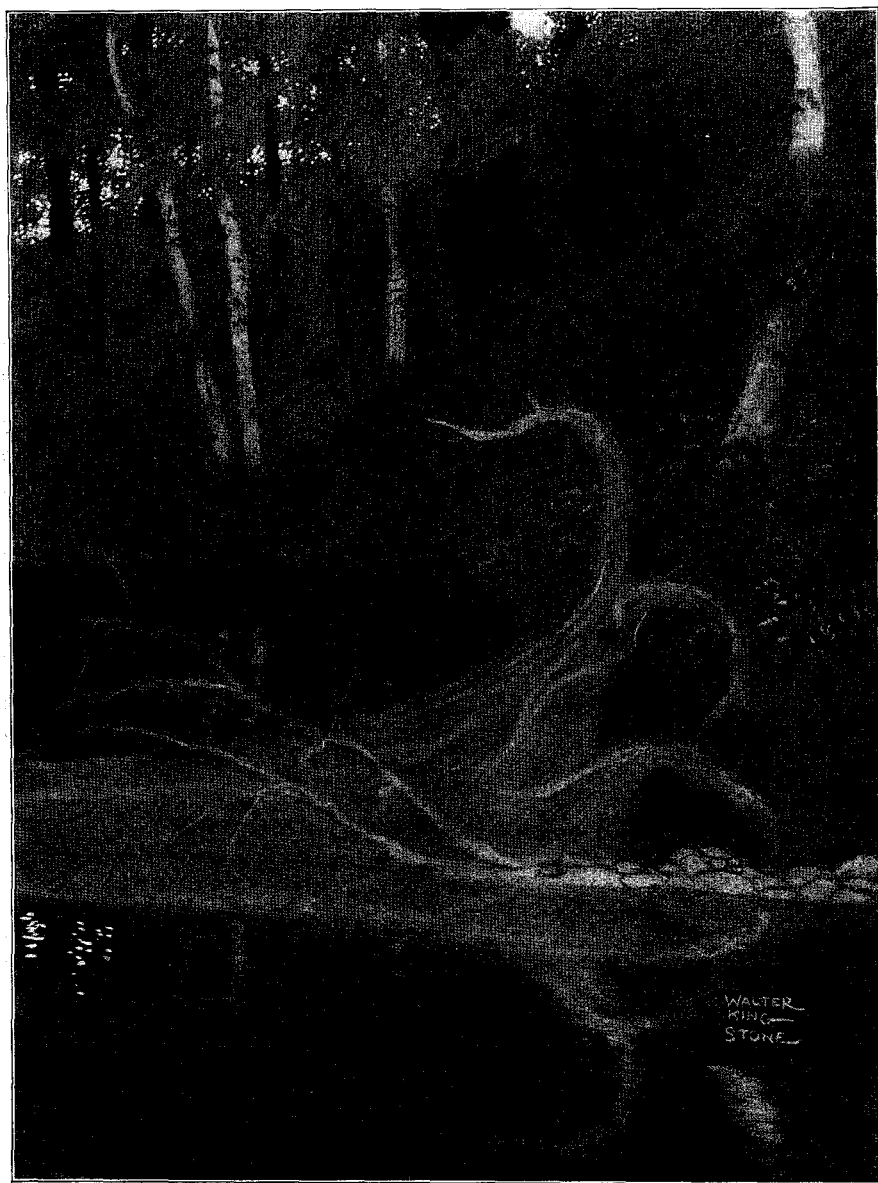


Presently there is a rustle in the grasses, and a small boy stands over

sky, and of your neighbors' houses, even of so much of your own garden as lies beyond this little field of your earth-bound vision, you are not aware at all. You feel curiously like Gulliver in Brobdingnag. As you rise to your feet, you are tempted to rub your eyes, like one awaking from a dream.

This, on a larger scale and enhanced by the charm of moving boat and lapping water, is the sensation of him who journeys

by a little water-way through the meadows and the hills. A well-behaved river is bound to be lower than its banks, so that sometimes your head, as you sit in your canoe, is actually below the floor of the world, sometimes on its level, but seldom or never above it. What a transformation this works on the landscape! Step into your craft, dip your paddle, glide out on the current, and the flowers and grasses on the



you . . . a one-piece bamboo fish-pole towering in his hand.—Page 32.

bank, scarce noted before, are suddenly the rich foreground of your picture. They are larger, more intricate, more beautiful, than you ever guessed. The cardinal flowers and Joepye-weed lift their blooms against the blue sky, instead of lying at your feet. The delicate designs of their petals emerge like a snow-flake on velvet. As you glide under arching willows or maples, you seem to be in the depth of a forest. The road or

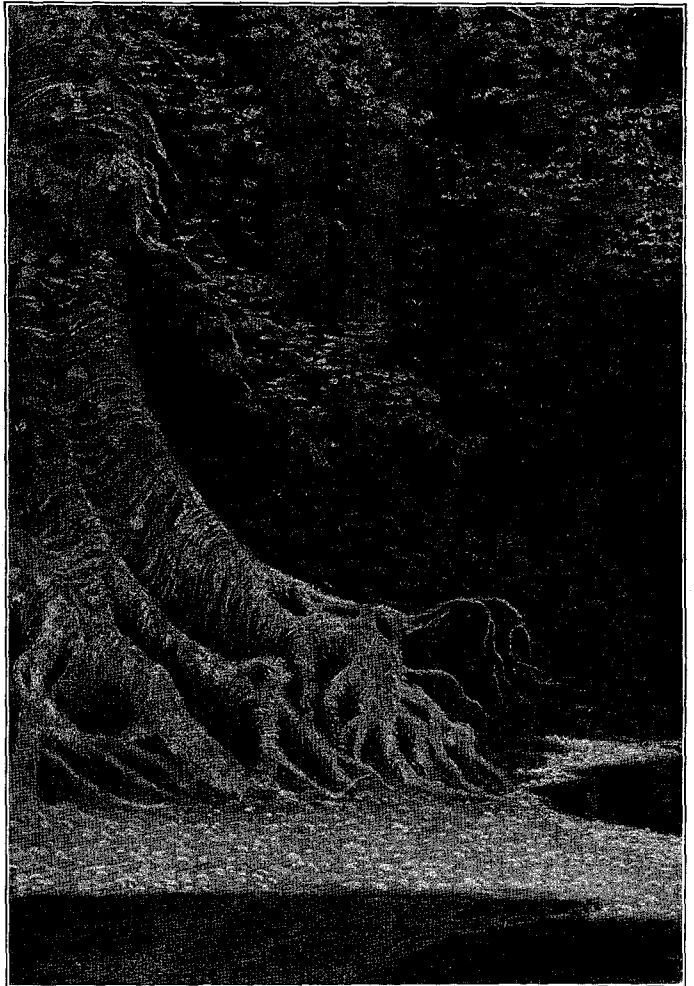
the trolley line may be but a few hundred yards away, yet you do not see them. You float silently up a liquid aisle beneath vaulted foliage, in a sufficient and cloistered world of your own.

It may be presently you catch the sparkle of bright sunlight on the water ahead, and emerging from the mottled shadows of the woods your canoe slips into a stretch of river where tall grasses come down to the

black, oozy banks. An old punt, half full of yellow water, is moored to a stake. Out in the fields you hear the hot click, click of a mowing machine, drowsier than a locust's song at summer noon. Men are near, no doubt horses, a road, perhaps a town. But you do not see them. You see only the old punt, the tall grasses on the bank, it may be the top of a far blue hill peeping over, and ahead the quiet waterway wandering again into the cool shadows of the maples. Those hay-fields might stretch to infinity for all you can say. Your view of the world is not comprehensive; it is the view of the worm rather than the bird. But how alluring is its strangeness, how restful its seclusion, between grassy banks under the dome of the summer sky. Even the ways of the worm may be pleasant, then—a fact worth finding out.

Presently there is a rustle in the grasses, and a small boy stands over you, staring down, a one-piece bamboo fish-pole towering in his hand. His body cuts against the sun, and, see, he has an aura in his hair!

Always there is this strangeness of the river way to give it perpetual allure. Do you meet with a fisherman sitting on the bank, it is his feet you see first. Always the bordering grasses are important, and how large the sky, how flat and restricted the plain when the banks sink down to give a glimpse of it! Passing under a bridge, the dust disturbed by a rumbling motor overhead shakes down upon you or tinkles on the water—sweetest of tiny sounds, this tinkle of dust on still water! It is as if you were in another world, below your human kind in space, but not, you are sure, in degree, so gently your craft

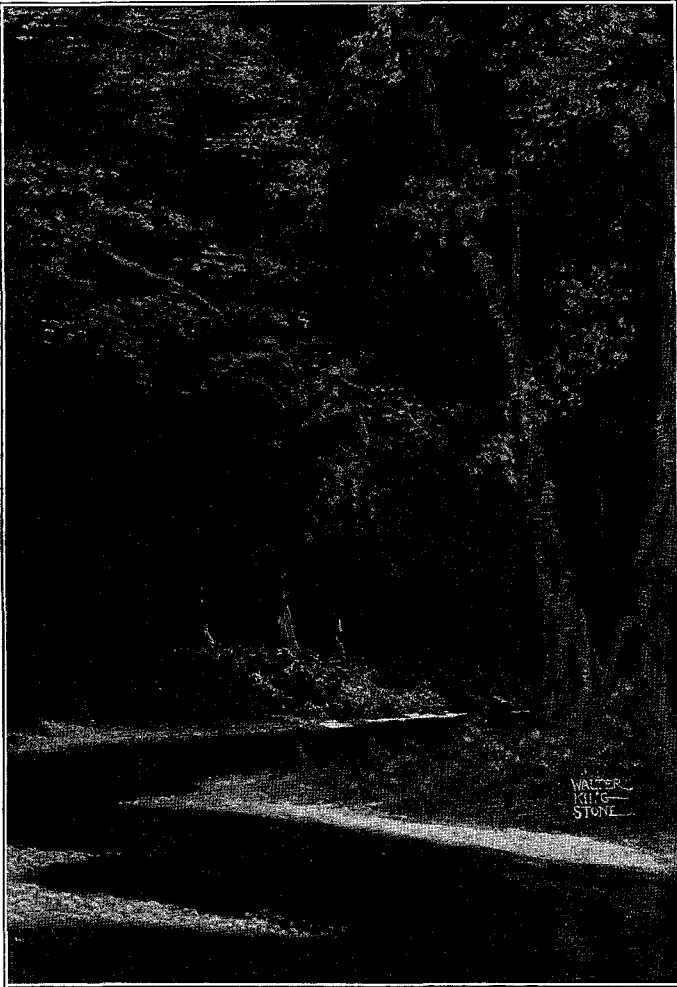


No mystery is quite like the mystery of a river

slips along amid the cloistered beauties of the stream.

"In the garden," writes Emerson in his "Journal," "the eye watches the flying cloud and Walden Woods, but turns from the village. Poor Society! what hast thou done to be the aversion of us all?" But need Society be our aversion because sometimes we turn from it in weariness to the contemplation of Walden Woods or the river way, or because our spirit recognizes in itself a primal kinship not alone with Society but with Solitude as well, with whispering waters and Joepye-weed and the tall grass that nods against the sky?

"What do they know of England who only England know?"



bend, as no curve is quite so beautiful.—Page 36.

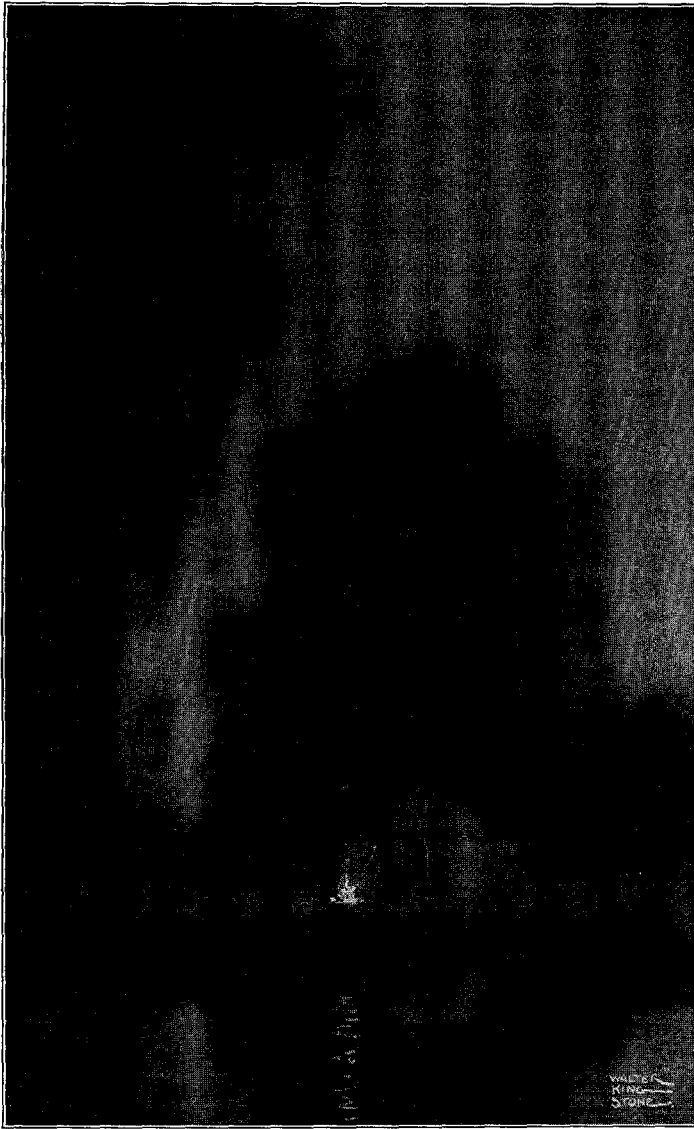
tion and the interrogating soul." The population of cities is a dull study to the boy, but the length of the Nile is poetry. Geography is a less interesting study to the child of to-day than it was to our fathers just in so far as the map of Africa has lost those delightful pink portions marked "unexplored," and the upper reaches of its rivers lost their dotted lines which indicated the Unknown. The boy is not greatly impressed by the size of the wheat crop of the United States, but what boy would not defend the size of the Mississippi against the world? A river comes from the Unknown, from the high hills and the forest, and it moves as irresistibly as a planet to the Unknown again, to the sea. It speaks forever the mystery of its origin and of its destination. Like a road, it calls perpetually to the imagination because it is going somewhere. But, unlike a road, there is no hint of man in its composition. It is the leader always. Man follows panting on its bank,

And what do we know of Society who know nothing of Solitude? He sees not the battle best who is in the brunt of it. He is not the master of his social relations whose every idea and action is born of human intercourse, because he is not the master of his own soul; he has ignored its relations to the primal and inanimate, its capacity for contemplation. "All great deeds," said Martineau, "are born of solitude." It is in solitude that the thought matures. It is in the face of his origins that what is trivial in man is disclosed to his questioning spirit. Let him go and contemplate rivers, and be ashamed of the size of last Sunday's newspapers!

Forever a river "addresses the imagina-

and lays his roads where the river has been the primal engineer.

We are all familiar with the river's calm and assured position in the centre of the picture. Whether it is the Rhine coming down through vine-terraced hills, or the magnificent Hudson sweeping out of the blue north into the view of those tenement-towered heights of upper Manhattan, or the Hoosatic curling through the meadows of Stockbridge ringed by purple hills, or the sluggish Charles gay with canoes amid the lawns of Dedham, or the Wild Ammonoosuc chattering out from the forests of Moosilauke and fighting its way through rugged intervals to reach the Connecticut, the view is always composed around the



You rise before the sun is free of the valley fog . . . build up the fire in last night's embers . . .—Page 36.

river, and no matter how high you climb to contemplate, widening your horizon, ever does that silver thread of water bind the landscape into a perfect whole.

So it is that man's roads winding by its banks, or his glittering steel rails following its curves, seem but to trail the primitive pioneer—as, indeed, is the fact—and where the river, with magnificent sweep and power, ploughs its way through the hills the glittering rails plunge after, with a kind

of joy of exploration, as if they cried: "We shall follow it and see what comes!" Small wonder the river dominates the imagination, and to the boy is the most delectable thing in geography. Even that brook behind his house somewhere joins the sea. He may launch a chip on its surface for a voyage of a thousand miles. What is the population of Algeria before such a living marvel as this?

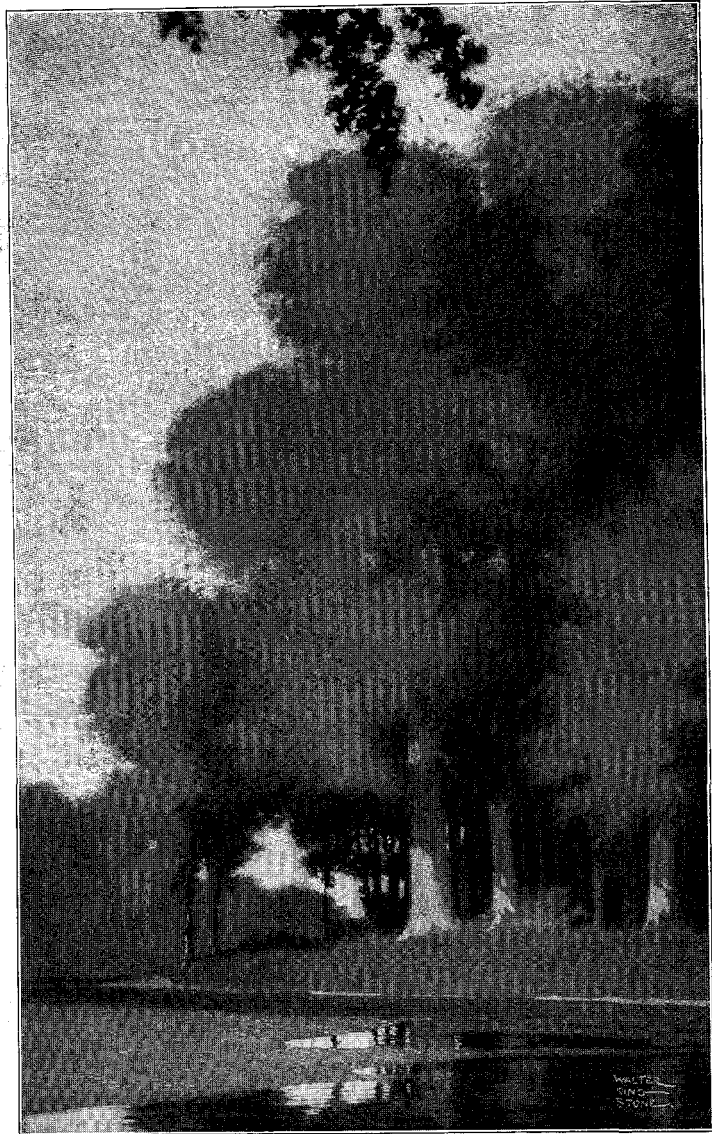
When I was a boy our base-ball field was on the summit of an almost imperceptible divide. A spring at the southern end sent a diminutive trickle down through a meadow where white violets grew, into the discolored waters of the "town brook," and thence ultimately into the Saugus River. A second spring at the northern end sent

a diminutive trickle through the muddy ooze of Duck Pond into the cranberry bog of Birch Meadow, and thence through three miles of white pine forest—now, alas! no more—into the long, forest-bordered reaches of the Hundred Acre meadows, where the Ipswich River wound its sinuous way, with sluggish bottoms where the horn-pout bit and gravel pools where we swam. I can remember as it were yesterday the day when I studied in my geography about

a divide, and realized with a thrill of joy that Kingman's field was such a thing. I raced home from school. I ran first to the southern spring, then to the northern, and told myself that each was the head-water of a river! It was my hour to stand "silent upon a peak in Darien." My childish imagination followed those trickles in the grass till my body was borne in a great boat on their mighty waters and my ears heard the sound of the sea. Geography for me had suddenly become alive, tingling—had suddenly become poetry. I waited with burning impatience for Saturday, to follow my northward running brook, muddy and torn and scratched, through the bogs and the pine woods, till it joined the Ipswich. And then I stood on a tuft of grass in the

swampy bottom where the two streams met and yearned for a craft to carry me down the larger body past grandfather's mill, past unknown towns, till the water tasted of the salt and the breakers boomed.

Since that far-off day, I have stood by a spring, bubbling from under a bowlder, and watched the thread of crystal water slip through the mosses into the depths of a mountain ravine, while tall peaks towered about me—slip away on its journey



The great trees on the bank behind you rise ethereal, phantom shadows against the ochre dawn.—Page 36.

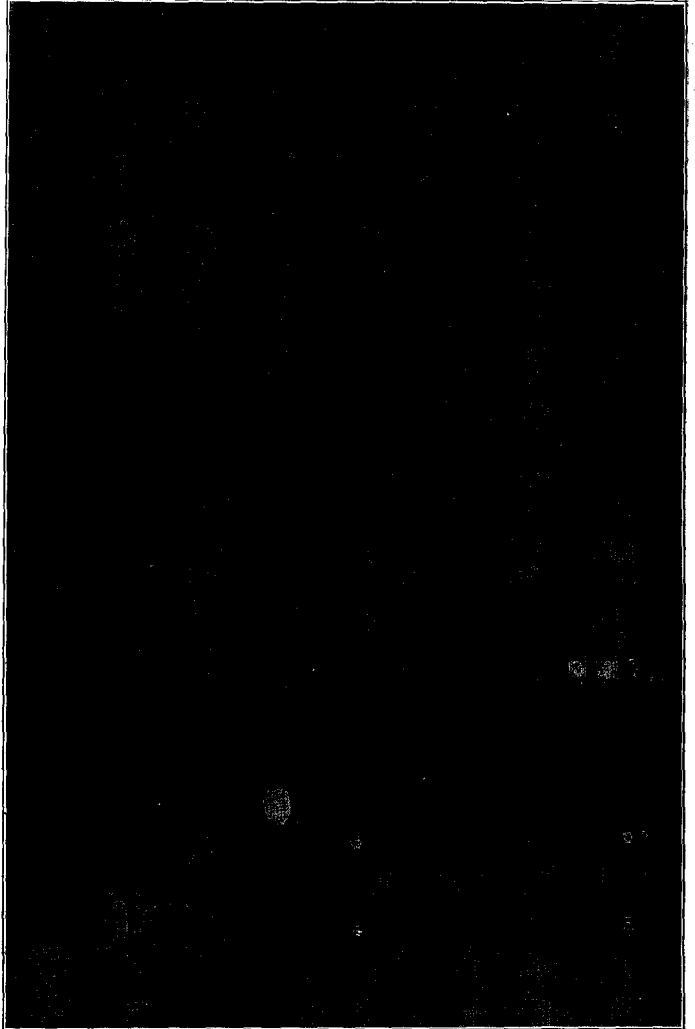
of a thousand miles to the sea. I have been at the high head of a river monarch. But I was less thrilled than the day when I first conceived that Kingman's field was a divide. Since that day, too, I have launched a boat on many rivers, but never with quite the expectant joy which attended the launching of the *Crusader*, for that long-dreamed-of trip down the Ipswich.

The *Crusader* was made at home (for every home in those days was a manual

training school), with ribs of ash and a covering of canvas, painted vivid red. Carefully parting my hair in the middle, at my grandfather's solemn advice, I launched forth below the mill pond for my far voyaging, I and another boy, in a rakish canoe, also home-made, called the *Stampedede*. The boys in the swimming hole came racing out like dolphins about our prows, but we beat them off with paddles, and sailed away into a land of wonder. How each river bend ahead lured us on—bends where the willows arched over the water, or a birch dropped a white reflection into the black depths, or the current seemed to widen, grow more sluggish, promising perhaps a mill pond, the excitement of a "carry," the thrill of a strange village! No mystery is quite like the mystery of a river bend, as no curve is quite so beautiful. When you are a boy on your first river voyage you do not pray for an arrow-like course, you welcome each curve and double as a fresh revelation of romance. When the river

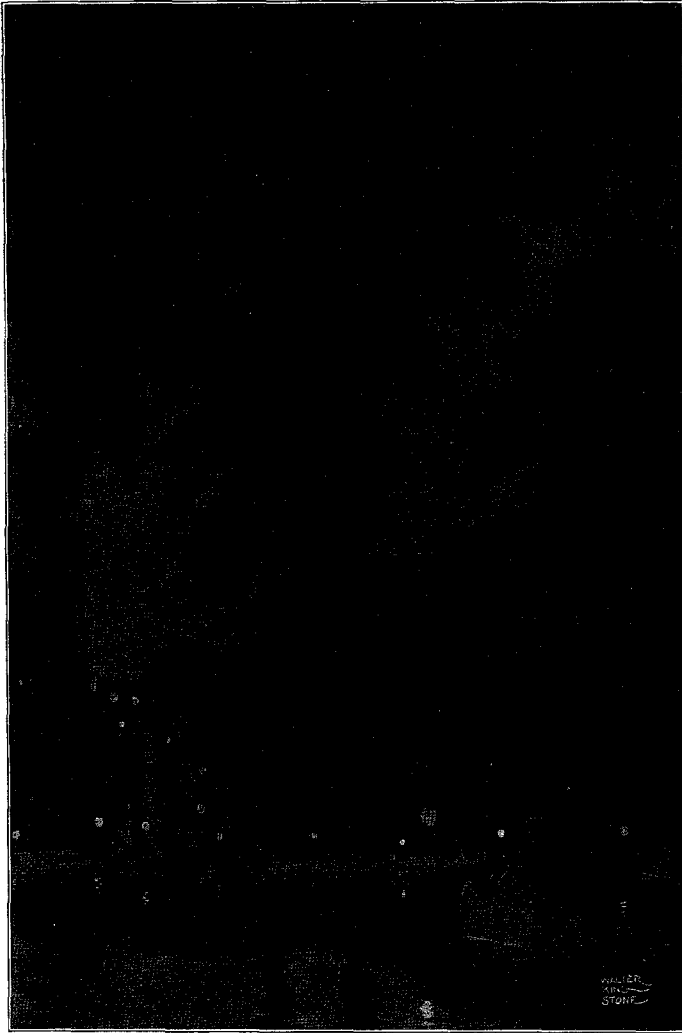
bend has lost its charm, then you may know you are middle-aged, indeed, and fit only for automobiles and a luxurious hotel at night.

What memories come back to him who has travelled by river ways, of camps regretfully left behind or human scenes which he has floated past, ethereal as a dream! There is always a wistful moment of parting from a pleasant camp, on tiny island or wooded bank. You rise before the sun is free of the valley fog, plunge in the cold water, catch a fish, perhaps, build up the fire in last night's embers, and while the coffee boils you look down the river way



In the gathering darkness you see lights on the water ahead . . . the faces of

which beckons, cool and strange in the light before the day. The great trees on the bank behind you rise ethereal, phantom shadows against the ochre dawn. The fire snaps yellow and warm. Ahead the stream winds into the mystery of the morning. You eat your breakfast, strike your tent, load the canoes, douse the embers, which sizzle pathetically, and with a backward glance of gratitude at your inn beneath the stars, you slip down the current for a new day's adventures. No officious landlord comes out to the curb to say good-by. No bell-hop is seen running to you with a morning paper and an eye



gay with Japanese lanterns. The landings are decked with color. Canoes are floating in procession, like bright water flies, with lamps at prow and stern. As your dark and travel-soiled craft shoots into the radius of these lights, the faces of girls flash at you, you hear the tinkle of their laughter, you move through the fairy scene and pageantry as through a dream, thrilling strangely to its human joy, yet strangely not a part of it, passing on to your lonely camp in the woods below. Such scenes remain in the memory when much else that seemed more important to our lives has faded and vanished, and they come back to us out of the past with a wistful sweetness, ever more beautiful with the years.

The "ingenious Spaniard" quoted by Izaak Walton says that, "rivers and the inhabitants of the watery element were made for wise men to contemplate, and fools to pass by without consideration." But we ourselves are not entirely convinced that the man who contemplates too

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hungry for tips. What the world is doing you neither know nor care. The morning mists are rising from the water. The stream lies clear ahead. The sun is golden on the distant hills. And your paddle digs the water till the little boat leaps with the joy of health and freedom.

Or it may be that twilight steals upon you while you are still paddling in search of a camping place free of the haunts of men, of towns and befouling mills. In the gathering darkness you see lights on the water ahead, hear the sounds of music and voices. Presently you have glided into fairyland. Lawns come down to the water,

habitually the inhabitants, truly contemplate the rivers. We have come upon the feet of many an angler, dangling over the bank, and lifted our eyes to a face whereon was writ less calm contemplation than annoyance at our disturbance of the water, or a sportsman's patient, stolid eagerness for game. We are far from persuaded that the average fisherman is a contemplative man at all, though it be heresy to harbor the doubt. Some of them are. So are many men who never fish. But, after all, to do anything well, requires concentration on your task, and we venture to affirm that nobody can cast a fly successfully in



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an alder thicket or under low-spreading maples or hemlocks whose mind is filled with philosophic reflections upon the destination of the stream or the beauty of the banks. Neither, we venture to affirm, is the patient watching of a cork on the water consistent with that breadth of vision, freedom of fancy and sensory alertness demanded by true contemplation. Contemplation of an inhabitant of the watery element means to the average angler one thing—what is the best way to haul him out? Contemplation of the river—which is the best pool for fish? No, the wise man who would truly contemplate rivers walks by their banks, if they will not float a canoe, or launches his craft upon them if they be deep enough, nor does he feel that he knows them until he has seen the world from their angle, from this curious viewpoint below the brink, and until he has followed them up into the hills whence they come and down toward the sea whither

they go. You do not know a river till you have become one with its current, a part of its life, winding with it through the meadows and fighting with it through the barriers of rock.

It is a curious fact which all sensitive observers must have noted that you get almost no “feel” of the contours of a country from the tonneau of an automobile. The sag of the springs, the extreme speed, the ease of the spurt up a hill, the rolling away of the landscape, the rush of the road to meet you, all combine to destroy that sense of local difference between one valley and the next. Of the delicate pleasures of road-side flowers and lovely vistas down logging roads and bird calls and wayfarers’ greetings, of course, you get nothing at all. That is why some of us, to the extreme perplexity of the rest of us, take to our feet on the back roads.

But even more intimately than from the winding highway, travelled afoot, the coun-



houses faced the other way, their back roofs peeping at you over the trees, while paths come down as if to watch you pass.

try discloses its subtler aspects to him who journeys down its rivers by canoe. A road goes arbitrarily, often, where man has willed. A river finds by the first law of its nature the bottom land, it draws in to itself ultimately all roads and ways of man, and from its surface one looks perpetually up, instead of now up, now down, getting a constant, unchanging perspective on everything within the field of vision, which cannot err or falsify. Whose house is set the higher on a hill? From the river you shall have no doubt. Those blue huddled hills and intersecting valleys resolve themselves out of confusion into the assured familiarity of a map, to the river voyager. He has, on the very scale of nature itself, one of those raised maps so dear to the heart of boyhood, and he is sailing through the heart of it. Perpetually ahead lies the beckoning bend, or the long vista of river-valley opening between the hills. Perpetually to right and left are timbered

slopes or grassy uplands, now and again parting to proclaim a tributary, threaded with roads that seem ever to be coming down to speak to you in your canoe, to bring you news of the country side. When you pass through a town, it is through the intimate life of the back yards, not down its formal main street; you view it in its shirt sleeves, as it were, you catch it off its guard, its houses faced the other way, their back roofs peeping at you over the trees, while paths come down as if to watch you pass. Once more, the river view has the charm of strangeness, reveals the world to you from a different angle.

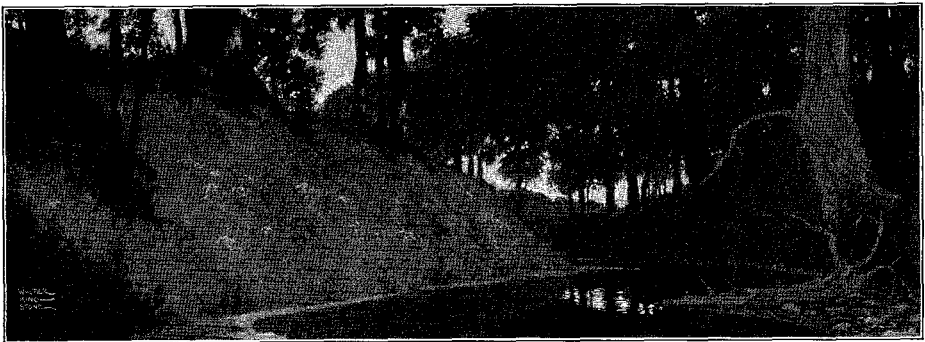
"Poor Society! What hast thou done to be the aversion of us all?" This thou hast done. Thou hast cast us and kept us in moulds of convention, in starched collars and paved streets and stuffy houses (or, more often in flats!); in habits of vision and of speech; thou hast compelled us too often to forget our own souls in the bicker

of market-place or assembly. This thou hast done because it is a law of our nature to herd with our kind, to fight for things material, to create art and sky-scrapers and fine clothes and grand opera and high tariffs and slums and creeds and all sorts of jumbled wisdom and folly. But it is a law of our nature, too, sometimes to revolt, to throw ourselves back on the bosom of the Inanimate, to cry out not for art but the huddle of hills into the sunset and the song of a thrush, not for sky-scrapers but the ranks of the towering pines, not for paved streets and trolley cars, but the soft seduction of a little river.

A pipe, a box of matches, a hatchet, a little tent, a rod and line, blankets, a coffee-pot and frying pan, a jug of water, a box of food, an old shirt, a canoe and the right companion to handle the bow-paddle, and in the ethereal river mists of a summer morning you launch your craft where the stream breaks out of its mountain cradle, and without need of map or compass give yourself gladly to its care until, perhaps, it joins the sea. It is a new world you shall see, through the magic lens of your lowered perspective, a world wherein many humble things are important and many great things shrink to insignificance. You shall pass through the haunts of men and care not for them. You shall camp in the fragrance of hemlocks and scatter the embers of your fire with regret. You shall make for the bend ahead with the joy of a discoverer, for the bend where the black

water steals mysteriously into the green, sun-flecked aisles of the forest, and your talk is hushed, your paddle muffled, till you creep in as silently as the moccasined Indian on the trail, as noiselessly as the water itself, or for the bend where the river, larger now, sweeps round a promontory covered with maples, all their shadowed symmetry backed by the blue sky, into the promise of sun-filled meadows and the languor of a summer day. Hour by hour the glide of the boat shall lull you, and when at twilight you climb stiff-legged out and rising upon the bank see the sky suddenly shrink, the world grow larger and familiar again, the grassy banks become once more not a bounding wall, but a small thing at your feet, the water shall still whisper a lullaby, running past you all the night.

And presently you shall go back to your Society—since there, after all, is probably your ultimate place—with a new light, if ever so feeble, on what is important in it and what trivial, and the wistful memory of your nights beneath the stars and your days on the bosom of the kindly stream. Such is the true contemplation of rivers. It has little to do with angling, after all. It is born of the impulse of solitude and the instinct in man to wander from the hills to the sea, on the track of those primal forces which are greater than he, which grant him a new glimpse of beauty or awake an old romance, which stir in his imagination the vast and steadying images of his origin.





THE COURAGE OF THE COMMONPLACE

By Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FREDERIC DORR STEELE

THE girl and her chaperon had been deposited early in the desirable second-story window in Durfee, looking down on the tree. Brant was a senior and a "Bones" man, and so had a leading part to play in the afternoon's drama. He must get the girl and the chaperon off his hands, and be at his business. This was "Tap Day." It is perhaps well to explain what "Tap Day" means; there are people who have not been at Yale or had sons or sweethearts there.

In New Haven, on the last Thursday of May, toward five in the afternoon, one becomes aware that the sea of boys which ripples always over the little city has condensed into a river flowing into the campus. There the flood divides and re-divides; the junior class is separating and gathering

from all directions into a solid mass about the nucleus of a large, low-hanging oak tree inside the college fence in front of Durfee Hall. The three great senior societies of Yale, Skull and Bones, Scroll and Key, and Wolf's Head, choose to-day fifteen members each from the junior class, the fifteen members of the outgoing senior class making the choice. Each senior is allotted his man of the juniors, and must find him in the crowd at the tree and tap him on the shoulder and give him the order to go to his room. Followed by his sponsor he obeys and what happens at the room no one but the men of the society know. With shining face the lad comes back later and is slapped on the shoulder and told, "good work, old man," cordially and whole-heartedly by every friend and acquaintance—by lads who have "made" every honor possible,