

AN UNEXPLAINED MYSTERY.

A TALE OF CANADIAN BACKWOODS LIFE.

A dilapidated, old and ruined sawmill is, or at least was, until a short time ago, standing surrounded by a few ancient log dwellings more dilapidated, if possible, and time-worn and stern-worn than itself, on a small tributary of the Grand River in Ontario. These old buildings had not been used for many years; and when I last saw them they had reached an advanced stage of sorry decrepitude. The clap boards, which had once covered their log sides, had long ago dropped away; the roof had in many instances fallen in; and the windows, innocent of glass, were almost hidden by a rank profusion of weeds growing undisturbed in the garden plots surrounding the forlorn houses. The yard was overgrown with thistles; the mill itself had dwindled to a mere skeleton; and what was now left of it—merely the black beams and rafters—stood out gaunt and repulsive from amongst the decaying ruins around. The old, steel, upright saw remained still fixed in its rotten wooden frame, but it was nearly eaten away by rust, and like the mill, was but the ghost of its former self.

In short, the whole locality possessed an exceedingly depressing and repulsive aspect, which was considerably intensified by the near proximity of a lonely, dark, evergreen swamp of cedar and tamarac, from whose depths issued the inky waters of a sullen stream, which flowed across the clearing with a calm, imperturbable course, until, coming in contact with the mill machinery, they were teased into a dull angry roar.

A brooding melancholy had taken possession of the deserted place and claimed it for its own. This decaying collection of ruined mill and old log huts was called Millhollow, and was once a promising and thriving little settlement. Its origin was almost precisely like half the villages and towns in this country; its location was good, and indeed there was no reason, in the ordinary course of circumstances, why Millhollow should not become as prosperous as have some of its contemporaries. But the little settlement was not destined for any such future; its history was to be short and calamitous, ending in desolation and decay.

The present writer was naturally interested in these old ruins, particularly as he, almost from early boyhood, had heard vague hints from several old-wise-acres who called themselves the first settlers, of a certain uncanny event in connection with their history. A brief holiday was taken advantage of to hunt up the records, the results of which, gleaned with care from many diverse sources, he thinks curious enough to present to the public.

Forty years ago this Christmas, or thereabouts, James Sampson and his wife Matilda, came to Millhollow from London. A few days previous to their arrival some one had cleared a little land by the side of a small stream in the midst of a dreary swamp, and built himself a log house, which he left a few months afterwards, driven away it is said, by the loneliness and mosquitoes. This house Mr. and Mrs. Sampson took temporary possession of. Being a man of some means, Mr. Sampson immediately purchased a considerable tract of land surrounding the clearing and set about building a large saw-mill and a more commodious and comfortable residence. These completed he energetically proceeded to provide lumber needed by the rapidly arriving settlers, to build their houses, on the road some miles away, known as the "old London road." He prospered at this business exceedingly. There was a ready and ever increasing market for all his mill could produce. A few years went swiftly past, and still the thrifty miller found his mill busy, and cash (in kind) flowing rapidly in. Any one passing through Mill Hollow in those days, and noting on every hand the signs of busy industry would hesitate to believe that a few more years and all would become silent again as before the advent of the first settler. Superstition and crime are most potent factors in retarding the healthy growth of a community, and Mill Hollow was destined to know something of each. In these early days, however, could be heard the sharp whirr of the steel saw, the roar of the mill-stream, the quick strokes of the woodman's axe, the coming and sounds of a multitude of men unloading logs, piling lumber, and the thousand and one things incident to a settler's life in a new country.

Mr. Sampson had built his mill nearly in the centre of a clearing of about fifteen acres in extent, and surrounding it at short intervals he had also built about twenty log houses to accommodate his mill hands and their families. His own house was precisely like any one of those all but in size; it was as large as any two of the others in the settlement. All the houses had little garden plots of perhaps a quarter of an acre in each, surrounded by strong, though rude, rail fences, unlovely in themselves but furnishing very necessary protection to the poultry, pigs and cows from the wolves and bears of the wilderness. The river which supplied the motive power to the mill, emerged from the Cedar Swamp at the right-hand, ran through the centre of the clearing in an almost straight course, and re-entered the Swamp again at the extreme left. On one side of the mill was a great heap of saw logs cut from enormous white pine trees. On the other side were neatly built piles of newly-sawn lumber awaiting transportation to the London Road. Scattered here and there over the clearing were rude sleighs used for hauling lumber and logs in winter, and heavy ungainly wagons for the same duty in summer. In short, Millhollow was a typical backwoods settlement, of which there were, at that time, scores throughout Ontario.

This was Millhollow several years after the arrival of the Sampson family. The owner seemed well content with what had been accomplished. Cut off though he was from every semblance of civilization by miles and miles of lonely forest, he had lived those years in blessed tranquillity, and he often said in the hearing of his mill hands that he was heartily glad he had come. So was not, however, Mrs. Sampson. She was a woman of an entirely different mental disposition from her husband. Where he was reserved and quiet, she was lively and sometimes even boisterous; where he was refined and affectionate, she was somewhat coarse; where he was humble she was proud. In short the couple had very little in common, and it was a very fortunate

thing that no children were born from their union. Mrs. Sampson had never been satisfied to live in the backwoods. In point of fact she hated the life with abiding hatred. But her husband, city-born as he had been, was resolved to persevere in his determination to remain buried in the wilderness, and the wife was forced to submit, so far, to her husband's will.

With the light of after events before us, who knows but Mr. Sampson was prompted in this by a wise instinct of self-preservation which failed only by reason that he had not gone deep enough. But of this anon. In the meantime it will be sufficient to note that the settlers became aware that Mr. Sampson had conceived an intense antipathy to city life, and that his wife Matilda loved it, though why this feeling had arisen in his case he never divulged. It was seen that they were a strangely assorted couple, something out of the common indeed, in the ill-assortment, and curious eyes were in consequence often upon them than would otherwise have been the case. It was remarked that Mr. and Mrs. Sampson never alluded to their earlier life by any chance. Thus it began to be suspected that this part of their lives was under a cloud and tabooed by common consent. The neighbors were perplexed at this reticence, and never neglected the slightest opportunity to obtain a clue to the fancied hidden mystery, if mystery there was. But Mr. Sampson's secret, did not immediately unroll itself, and guesses and surmises proved a waste of valuable time.

At last, however, an event occurred which excited the settlers considerably, and gave rise to a good deal of whispering at the expense of Mr. Sampson. A stranger came to the settlement and hung about the place for weeks, appearing at irregular intervals, coming, from nobody knew where, and departing just as mysteriously, but always keeping out of Mr. Sampson's sight.

Mrs. Peters the gossip of the place, declared, but few paid any attention to the story at the time, that she saw this stranger, who was as ill-favored as to look as could well be, being endowed with a forbidding hooked nose, ungainly figure, wide mouth, strong jaws, small, hard grey eyes, a livid disagreeable looking scar on one cheek, in earnest conversation with Mrs. Sampson for over two hours behind the mill. Her curiosity prompting her to watch the pair closely, she stole out of her house making a circuit of the mill to the opposite side, her intention being to get behind a clump of bushes a short distance from where the pair were standing, and over hear what was being said.

But when she reached her vantage point she found to her chagrin that Mrs. Sampson was gone, but the stranger was still there with a mocking smile on his lips and his face directed toward the dwelling of the Sampsons. Mrs. Peters had not been at her post twenty seconds when she heard footsteps approaching from the direction of the mill. The stranger, evidently hearing them too, looked surprised and apprehensive, glanced this way and that, and finding that he could not get out of sight drew himself together and immediately was confronted by Mr. Sampson. The latter had been wholly unaware of the stranger's presence, for Mrs. Peters saw him suddenly come to a full stop and heard him ejaculate in consternation and anger:

"My God! Redlaw, you here? Mar, or rather devil! take heed that you do not cross my path once too often. I have suffered much from you, and there's a limit to human endurance. Why did you seek us out? What do you expect to do? But I need not ask you—I need not ask you. Begone! and allow me and mine to live our lives in peace."

The stranger turned away with a derisive laugh, and as he strode off Mrs. Peters heard him say:

"Humbug! You've had your innings, Sampson. I've sworn to have mine if I have to follow you to the pit!"

The stranger was not seen again in Millhollow, but it was noticed by Mrs. Peters that Mr. Sampson was a changed man thereafter. He grew moody and careworn; eating little or nothing, and moved around like a man just recovering from a severe illness.

A few weeks after the stranger's final disappearance occurred the tragedy which thrilled the whole county with terror and dismay. The owner of Millhollow was done to death, and his wife was nowhere to be found. This shocking event was discovered the following morning after its occurrence by Mr. Brooke, the foreman of the mill. He usually reached the mill in the morning a few minutes before anybody else to prepare for the daily routine, and this particular morning was no exception to the rule. The foreman observed nothing unusual until he reached the stairs which led to the bottom of the mill, and on these he was horrified to see several pools of blood. At the same time he observed the outline of a human form lying in the sawdust at the foot of the stairs. Rushing out at once and calling help, Mr. Brooke went back to find the investigator, which resulted in finding Mr. Sampson lying in a pool of blood cold and still.

He had been stabbed in the neck from behind and his body flung down the stairs under the floor of the mill amongst the black timbers and heaps of moist sawdust, where it had evidently lain all night. When this discovery was made, the workmen selected one of their number to break the sad tidings to the widow who was supposed to be at home. The messenger, a few moments later, returned hurriedly with the intelligence that the house was deserted, and Mrs. Sampson nowhere to be found.

Although an immediate hue and cry was raised, the murderer was not discovered, which was not remarkable, as he had several hours' start, and the swamp was dense, and many miles in extent, sufficiently large, in fact, to hide an army of murderers.

The authorities at the county town beset themselves, and sent officers here and there, but all to no purpose. The murderer defied all pursuit. Neither could anything be learned of Mrs. Sampson—she had disappeared as effectually as if the earth had opened and swallowed her up. The settlers bethought themselves of the recent visit of the mysterious stranger, and a serious effort was made to trace him up, but it led to nothing.

Suspicion pointed to a guilty complicity of the wife and the stranger, but suspicion

was not necessarily fact, and the pair, if they were guilty, had covered their tracks so well that it availed nothing. Time, meanwhile, sped along as usual, and the settlers gradually returned to their avocations. Mr. Brooke, as foreman of the workmen of the mill, assumed charge as before the murder, and the mill was started once more and would run until it was known what had become of Mrs. Sampson.

The tragedy continued, as a matter of course, the all-absorbing topic in the settlement. The mill hands rarely entered the mill without shuddering, and not one of them, even dare-devil Dick Hart not excepted, ever cared to venture to the gloomy recesses under the upper floor where the murdered man was found amongst the slimy debris. The spot was too suggestive. The dim uncertain rays of light which struggled feebly through the interstices of the logs and clap-boards, were just dim enough to shed an uncanny glamour around; and the never-ceasing gurgling of water from the mill race intensified the feeling of dread which every one felt the moment the cheerful day light above was left behind the trap door of the upper floor.

II

On Christmas evening, several months after the occurrence of the tragedy, Mr. Brooke, the foreman, his wife and family, and several of the mill hands including the redoubtable Dick Hart, were gathered after supper around the immense open fire place, in which great logs of wood roared and flamed and sent out volumes of genial warmth and light throughout the capacious apartment, which served the double capacity of living and sitting room in Mr. Brooke's abode.

It had been snowing heavily all day, and now as the night had settled down the storm was greatly increased. The wind howled outside over the dark and gruesome forest, and came in heavy and well sustained gusts against the staunch log house, rattling the windows as if it would shake them out of their frames, and roaring suddenly down the cavernous chimney. Every one felt thankful of a roof on such a night, and no honest man cared to be abroad. The conversation at Mr. Brooke's turned, after a time, as was natural, upon the late tragedy, which, although it already had been discussed from almost every point of view, was still a subject of absorbing interest to every resident of Millhollow.

"I think it very strange," Mr. Brooke began, "that the authorities have yet made no headway in tracing that stranger who was here shortly before the murder."

"Bless your life, where are they to look?" answered old Sol Peters, removing his pipe from his mouth with a jerk. "Who knows but that fellow may be a thousand miles off by this time. I believe he got 'tin' enough from Sampson to carry him to China."

"I don't think he got much money," said Dick Hart, "for I've heard Mrs. Sampson say that the old man always hid his money somewhere and never carried much around with him."

"Do you think Mrs. Sampson shared her husband's fate?" queried Mr. Brooke of nobody in particular.

"No," said Dick Hart as if he had been personally appealed to. "No; you can depend upon it wherever that hook-nosed stranger has gone Matilda Sampson will not be far away. I believe the murder was a put up job between them, and they have gone away together, and the authorities are a pack of jackasses or they would have been caught before this."

"I am sometimes half inclined to think as you do," Mr. Brooke said quietly, "yet we may be doing an innocent person a great wrong by our suspicions."

"Why it is plain as a pikestaff," answered Hart. "Matilda Sampson and Hook-nose are lovers. They probably understood one another pretty thoroughly in the 'old country.' Mr. Sampson, to avoid trouble and Hook-nose together, comes to Canada and hides himself in the backwoods. For some years there is peace. But finally Hook-nose hunts up his old flame, who by this time is tired of mosquitoes and her husband's company, and is quite ready to go anywhere or do anything to escape them. The precious pair plot to put Sampson out of the way, and take what money he had saved, for their own use. The plan succeeds, and they are gone. That's my unravelling of the mystery."

This opinion evidently coincided with the ideas entertained by the other settlers, as no one called it into question, and all grew solemn over the enormity of the crime thus presented, and shook their heads and gave each other significant looks.

Old Sol Peters, once more removing the ever-present pipe from his mouth, started the whole company by asserting that he would not be at all surprised if Mr. Sampson should walk in upon them at any moment.

Mrs. Brooke, looking horrified, threw down her knitting and stared at the imperturbable Peters, then ejaculated:

"My goodness, Mr. Peters, what do you mean? You surely don't think the poor man is wandering around such a night as this? But, fudge! I didn't we bury him?"

"Yes, we put his body, poor man, into the ground; but do you suppose, as long as his murderer stays unhung, that his spirit can rest quiet? No. He'll come one of these days and ask us if we're not ashamed of our selves to be resting and sleeping and enjoying ourselves, leaving the villain who struck him, to live on his ill-gotten gains in safety. Perhaps you will not believe me, but I know of more than one poor mortal coming back from the other world because of some unbusiness regarding personal affairs in this."

From which the intelligent reader will infer that old Sol Peters did not belong to the modern materialistic school, but on the contrary, he had filled his mind full of old wives' fables and superstitions until half the children in the settlement avoided him as they would the devil.

Being what he was it was not strange that Peters could not be induced to enter the mill after the occurrence of the murder. He would cheerfully undertake any kind of work outside as long as he was not required in the mill. Dick Hart, however, was made of different material. It mattered little to him whether he was inside or outside the mill, and he was popularly believed to fear neither man nor the Evil Spirit. He even enjoyed hearing other people relating stories of the supernatural, and so now, after Peters had solemnly warned the company what they might expect, he leaned back in his cosy seat, puffed little clouds of tobacco smoke above his head for a minute, and then winking at the rest of the company, he

entrusted Peters to tell them the particulars of some such occurrence as he had mentioned.

Peters, after hemming and hawing for a little, finally complied in a low voice tone as follows:

"I really have seen several visitants from the other world. The first time was many, many years ago, though I remember the event well enough, and it is the one I shall tell you about. I was a young man when it occurred and it naturally made a deep impression upon me,—an impression which had a good deal to do with making me what you see me to-day, a devoutly religious man, living in the blessed hope of one day coming face to face with dear friends long passed away from this troubled bustling life of ours. I feel sure I shall see and know them and that they will see and know me. With that I am content; what more indeed could one desire."

"Well, as I was saying, when I was quite a young man, my brother Adam, who was older than I was, went to sea. He was a middy on H. M. S. *Hector*. Five years later his vessel was ordered to the West Indies and took part in several engagements with the French. We heard this from several seamen who had been sent home with wounds which prevented them from serving His Majesty any further."

"But none could tell us anything of Adam, and as we received no letters or other intelligence, we did not know for several months whether he was alive or dead, and we naturally grew very uneasy about him. My mother, then well up in years, worried a great deal over the long silence, and one day she said that Adam, alive or dead, ought to know of some way of relieving the anxiety we felt for him. The night after she said this, I felt very miserable thinking about my brother, and tossed about for hours without being able to go to sleep."

Finally, I think it must have been towards morning, I sank into a sort of uneasy slumber from which I was suddenly awakened by some one saying close to my ear, 'Brother Solomon, Solomon' I looked around the room; as it was still dark I could see no one, and believing that I was the victim of some troubled dream, I soon closed my eyes, and was about to sink once more into slumber, when I heard the same words as before, spoken very distinctly close to my ear. Instantly every faculty I possessed was fully awake. The room suddenly became light from a full moon which had burst through the scurrying clouds for a brief moment, and I became painfully conscious that there was somebody in the room beside myself, and that somebody was actually lying on the bed by my side with an arm flung across my body.

I was very much frightened and was about to cry out for assistance, when I chanced to notice that the figure was clothed in seaman's toggery. Then I bethought myself of the words, 'Brother Solomon, Solomon,' and the idea occurred to me that the figure was possibly my brother Adam come home from sea. I put out my hand and touched the figure on the shoulder, before I knew scarcely what I was doing, and said 'Is that you Adam?' Without answering the figure turned itself towards me and raised its hand, and I instantly saw that it was really my brother.

"It was Adam, but, indeed, greatly changed from the Adam who had left us long ago. His face was pale and leaden-looking, and swollen in a frightful manner; his hair seemed to be wet and all matted together; and there was a great cut on the temple from which blood was still oozing. It was an awful, awful sight that I saw there in the pale moon light."

"I could not bear to look at it, and buried my face with a shudder, among the bed clothes. When I recovered sufficient courage to again confront my ghastly bed fellow, I found that the figure had arisen from the bed and was standing close by, with folded arms, gazing down at me. As soon as my eyes met his he turned away and was moving without a sound toward the open window when something gave me courage to call his name. At the sound of my voice the figure stopped, gave me a long lingering look with his great mournful eyes, then slowly pointed with his right hand to the gaping wound in his forehead. After standing for a moment thus, its figure gradually got more and more indistinct and finally altogether faded away without my being able to see whether it had left the room by the window or the door, or had sunk through the floor. Then I got up and searched the room but nothing was there. If any of you, I think, had seen what I saw that night you would never doubt but that the dead can, and sometimes do, come back from the other world."

"That's a very singular story," admitted Hart, puffing away more rapidly at his pipe, "but didn't you find some blood about next morning?"

"Not a particle," Peters declared indignantly. "But the fact of Adam having been in the house does not depend altogether upon me. He showed himself to my mother, and pointed out the wound in his forehead as he had to me, and then faded away just as mysteriously. My mother never recovered from the shock she received that night, and just before she died a letter was received from one of the surgeons of Adam's death. He died, the letter said, from a clotted stroke, in the head received while trying to board a French man-of-war, and the date of his death was the day he appeared at his home covered with blood, and wet with sea-water of the West India seas."

"You tell a pretty strong ghost story, and that's a fact," said Dick Hart, as the old man concluded, "but it's not so very late yet. Couldn't you tell us another?"

"No, no, Hart; one must do you," said Mr. Brooke; "don't you see Peters is not equal to any more?"

And, in truth, Mr. Brooke was right. Peters was looking as if very little more would upset him altogether. He was trembling nervously, and pale as death, as if the occurrence he had been relating had only just been experienced. His story, told as it had been with simple candor, and, evidently, with entire belief in its truth, was having its effect upon the party.

Sudden silence fell upon all, and no one seemed in a hurry to break it. This interlude within, served but to give emphasis to the turmoil of the elements outside of the house, which seemed to grow more violent as the evening wore away. Every fresh gust seemed stronger and more resistless than its predecessor.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A seal plush bonnet has the brim bordered with natural beaver.

FARM.

AGRICULTURAL ITEMS.

A large proportion of the most successful bee-keepers in the United States are ministers. Several rectors of the E. established church in England give instruction in bee-keeping to their parishioners.

Many prominent sheep raisers in Tennessee have resolved to abandon the business, owing to the want of a dog law, asserting that 300,000 sheep cannot be maintained against 500,000 dogs.

Hogs differ as much as other animals in their ability to take on fat. Thirty young hogs of improved breeds will gain much faster on the same amount of food than old and unthrifty animals that belong to no recognized breed.

It is claimed that the sugar beet in California does not exhaust the soil. A beet raiser reports raising on his ground from fourteen to twenty-nine tons per acre in four years, planting on the same ground each year without fertilizers.

Theodore Roosevelt does not believe in the big thousand acre farms of the West, and says that in almost every case these farms have been really bankrupted most of the rich men who tried to run them, but who have had to back down before the enterprise and industry of the small farmers.

The experiment of milking cows three times a day was tried at the Iowa agricultural college, and the average daily gain of the herd was four pounds, or half enough to pay for the extra trouble and expense. The increase in milk is not considered sufficient to pay for the labor and expense; even when cows yielding over twenty quarts daily are used. The only advantage is that the cows will have to be kept in the barnyard and soiled, thereby effecting a greater saving of manure.

A London paper claims that "there is no better way of securing a heavy crop of peaches and nectarines than by putting a colony of bees in the house when the trees are in blossom." The English grow peaches in hot houses, but a hive may also be useful in the orchards here.

A correspondent kills Canada thistles by pouring a small quantity of benzine around the roots. He claims that one application will do the business thoroughly. This isn't exactly the time of year to try it, but it may be well to make a note of it for future reference.

One of the most wasteful practices, says the *Stockman*, is the too common one of feeling on the ground. Go where you will and you will find farmers feeding their sheep on the ground in the worst weather that ever stormed. Not only out of consideration for the dumb animals, but as a matter of economy, troughs should be constructed in which to place the feed.

Prof. Cook, in his paper on Economic Entomology, says the reason why imported insect pests are for a time more destructive than native species is in the fact that they have fewer parasites or predaceous enemies to contend with. In the course of a few years these enemies increase in such numbers as to hold them in check. He said that new insect pests are learning to feed upon plants heretofore not disturbed by them, so that the entomologist has constant work before him.

The famous Lorillard farm in New Jersey contains 1000 acres. The barn has stalls for 56 horses; 40 hands and 15 teams are employed in the farm work. In one building are 200 stalls for cattle. The pigeon is 408 feet long and holds 300 hogs. The corn crib holds 10,000 bushels of shelled corn. The stable in which the yearlings are housed contains 68 box stalls, and the centre of the three sections of the building is covered with glass, and affords a dry place where the colts can exercise in wet weather.

CATTLE HEALTH.

The *Western Rural* has some positive ideas on the treatment of animal diseases. Most of these diseases can be cured in the feeding-box before they break out. A great deal of the work that veterinarians are called upon to perform is really needless. A diseased condition of animal life is produced by some violation of nature's laws. The great study of the people should be not how to cure diseases so much as how to prevent them. In the olden times cattle and horses seemed to require much less doctoring than at present. The single cow of today that is treated almost like one of the family is hardly ever sick. Animal health is easy to maintain, if those who handle stock will use judgment and care. The farmer's children are generally models of health, yet they get little doctor's care beside what their mother gives them. Her remedies are simple, yet they succeed because they are given in time, and because constant attention is given to the children's condition. If farmers would doctor their animals on this same principle there would be much less disease. There are too many herds of cattle in this country that are pampered into disease. They get too much care. Their owners mean to give them the best possible treatment, but the matters of feeding and shelter are badly overdone. These with the victims of exposure and rough treatment, and those weakened by in-breeding, make up a grand army of invalids that yearly increases. Buck Fanshaw stopped a riot before it had a chance to break out. His example is worthy of imitation in the stock business. It is well to cure diseases before they break out, and this can only be done by careful treatment.

A Lesson in Morality.

"Now see heah, you Junius Brutus, you jes walk turkey ober to dis side ob de structure, an' explain ter yo' po' but hones parunt how's yo' kim by dat er squash," said old Gabe Snowdown to his youngest pleaninny, who had just staggered into the cabin under the weight of a huge cow pumpkin. "Did yer confabulate dat fram dem po' white trash down de road, yo' son of Belias?"

"Wull, I jest did, daddy, an' I creeped er long er half mild' in de shade ob de fence comin' home, cos de sun am po'ful hot ter day."

"Huh! Go laung, yer good fer-nothin' niggah. I jes ergusted with yer. Hain't yer ole daddy tole yer often enuff dat no hones' niggah evah totes hum fixins at dis time er day?"

Often times woman will dissuade her son from marrying, but it is suspected that she is influenced by remembering how big a fool the boy's father made of himself when he married.