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A Summer in Virignia

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A SUMMER IN VIRGINIA

DEAR HUB:

We find it very pleasant to welcome your friendly face week after week to our quiet retreat among the Virginia hills. You bring with you an invigorating breath of New England air, and pleasant memories of the city where some of the happiest hours of our lives have been spent. Dear old Boston! With all her faults we love her still, and fondly believe that the day will yet come when, freed from the unworthy prejudice which, we grieve to know, she still cherishes, she will stand forth the representative of the truest liberality as she is now of the highest intellectual culture. And may the new HUB prove an important instrument in the regeneration of the old.

Perhaps you will like to hear somewhat of our life in this peaceful corner of the Old Dominion, whither we fled some weeks ago from the heat and malaria of Washington. We are near Lincoln, a pretty little village crowning the summit of a hill and nestling among fine old trees. It is a settlement of Friends and is, in consequence, notable for its exquisite neatness. The houses look as if they were freshly painted over night, and the little gardens in front, bright with gay flowers, have an unmistakable air of Quaker order and regularity. The green, dotted with trees, reminds one of some of the English villages. There is an air of serenity and repose about the place which adds to its attractions and we agree in pronouncing it very charming and in striking contrast to the forlorn and dilapidated villages which too often meet the eye in the South.

The house in which we are staying is situated in a picturesque hollow, just outside of the village. In the pleasant grounds we can always find shade, and we pass our brief holiday in reading, writing, lounging, and playing croquet, with an occasional drive. We are in the midst of beautiful scenery for which, indeed, this county of Loudon is famous. Around us are high hills from which there is a fine view of the Blue

Ridge range. Our sunsets are wonderful. I wish I could paint for you one that we watched not long since, one of the most gorgeous I ever saw. But I should lay aside my pen in despair were I to try to describe the glories of crimson and gold, purple and rose, the softer beauty of white, fleecy clouds floating over the exquisite blue of the sky, "boats of pearl on a sapphire sea;" and the dark, solemn majesty of the mountains in striking contrast to the glow and brilliancy of the heavens. How could pencil of artist or pen of poet hope to reproduce those wonderful hues, all the incomparable beauty and glory of the scene? Let no lesser mortal, then, dare attempt it.

One day we drove to Mt. Gilead, one of the nearest off-shoots of the Blue Ridge. Through the highly cultivated country, past fields of waving corn and rich, fragrant clover, through lovely woods which afforded us a welcome shelter from the burning sun and through whose foliage we constantly caught glimpses of the mountains. We drove on and on, ever ascending, until we reached the summit, from which we had a grand view. At our feet lay the luxuriant valley of the Shenandoah and above it, like sentinels, towered the lofty mountains. We had another glorious sunset, and drove home through the moonlit night, whose beauty made a fitting close to our delightful day.

Yesterday we drove ten miles to the Bear's Den, a cave under huge rocks which crown the summit of one of the highest peaks of the Blue Ridge. From this point we had the finest view that we have yet obtained of the smiling Shenandoah Valley, the river winding through it like a silver thread, and the sombre, wooded mountains by which we seemed to be completely encircled. In the distance we could see famous "Winchester town," and we knew that not far away, but concealed from us by the intervening hills, lay Charlestown and Harper's Ferry, names ever sacred to those who revere the memory of one of the purest and most high-souled of martyrs. All around us were huge rocks and trees, under whose shade

we sat a long time, sometimes enjoying in silence the magnificent view, sometimes listening to songs with which some of the sweet-voiced members of our party entertained us. Those were indeed golden hours whose remembrance will be to us "a joy forever." In the presence of these solemn, majestic mountains, one seems to be brought nearer to Him who "fashioned them with his hand." How deeply are we made to feel his greatness and our insignificance. "How wonderful are Thy works, O Lord! In wisdom hast Thou made them all."

Returning home we drove through a picturesque little village which lies at the foot of the mountain, bearing the euphonious name of Snickersville! We greatly marvelled why so pretty a place should bear the burden of such a name. Our homeward drive, through the lengthening shadows of the evening, was very delightful; the air was so pure, sky and earth so lovely and peaceful. It was hard to realize that all this region was once a thoroughfare for the contending armies in the rebellion. The tramp of steeds, the roll of heavy artillery and baggage wagons were constantly heard through these roads. There was fighting at Union, within seven miles of this place, and the people tell us how plainly they could hear the roar of cannon and in what terror and consternation they were during those stormy days. How great is the contrast now.

"Now all is fresh and calm and still,

Alone the chirp of flitting bird,

And cry of children on the hill,

And bell of wandering kine are heard.

"No solemn host goes trailing by,

The black-mouthed gun and staggering wain;

Men start not at the battle-cry.

Oh, be it never heard again!"

The people of this neighborhood, being nearly all Friends and never having held slaves, were loyal during the war. They are now

mostly Republicans, and are particularly active in the temperance movement. Every year a large temperance meeting (a "bush meeting," as it is called), is held in a grove at Purcellville, the nearest town to Lincoln. We attended it this summer and were greatly interested. About two or three thousand persons were present, of all ages, classes, and colors. Some very stirring speeches were made, and listened to with great attention by most of the audience. It is cheering and encouraging to know that progress is being made in this great and glorious cause, even in that part of our land which has hitherto been the most benighted in this respect.

I fear I have wearied you with this long letter and will now close. Perhaps, if you will not consider another epistle an infliction, I may write to you again within the shadow of the dome of the Capitol.

August '83