



The White Mountains

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North American

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From times of old these noble hills have been the scenes of supernatural visitations and mysterious occurrences. The tallest peak of the Agiochooks—as they were, in Indian naming—was the seat of God himself, and the encroachment there of the white man was little liked. Near Fabyan’s was once a mound, since levelled by pick and spade, that was known as the Giant’s Grave. Ethan Allen Crawford, a skilful hunter, daring explorer, and man of herculean frame, lived, died, and is buried here, and near the ancient hillock he built one of the first public houses in the mountains. It was burned. Another, and yet another hostelry was builded on the site, but they likewise were destroyed by fire. Then the enterprise was abandoned, for it was remembered that an Indian once mounted this grave, waved a torch from its top, and cried in a loud voice, “No pale-face shall take root on this spot. This has the Great Spirit whispered in my ear.”

Governor Wentworth, while on a lonely tour through his province, found this cabin of Crawford's and passed a night there, tendering many compliments to the austere graces of the lady of the house and drinking himself into the favor of the husband, who proclaimed him the prince of good fellows. On leaving, the guest exacted of Crawford a visit to Wolfeborough, where he was to inquire for "Old Wentworth." This visit was undertaken soon after, and the sturdy frontiersman was dismayed at finding himself in the house of the royal governor; but his reception was hearty enough to put him at his ease, and when he returned to the mountains he carried in his pocket a deed of a thousand acres of forest about his little farm. The family that he founded became wealthy and increased, by many an acre, the measure of that royal grant.

Not far below this spot, in the wildest part of the Notch, shut in by walls of rock thousands of feet high, is the old Willey House, and this, too, was the scene of a tragedy, for in 1826 a storm loosened the soil on Mount Willey and an enormous landslide occurred. The people in the house rushed forth on hearing the approach of the slide and met death almost at their door. Had they remained within they would have been unharmed, for the avalanche was divided by a wedge of rock behind the house, and the little inn was saved. Seven people are known to have been killed, and it was rumored that there was another victim in a young man whose name was unknown and who was walking through the mountains to enjoy their beauty. The messenger who bore the tidings of the destruction of the family was barred from reaching North Conway by the flood in the Saco, so he stood at the brink of the foaming river and rang a peal on a trumpet. This blast echoing around the hills in the middle of the night roused several men from their beds to know its meaning. The dog belonging to the inn is said to have given first notice to people below the Notch that something was wrong, but his moaning and barking were misunderstood, and after running back and forth, as if to summon help, he disappeared. At the hour of the accident James Willey, of Conway, had a dream in which he saw his dead brother standing by him. He related the story of the catastrophe to the sleeping man and said that when "the world's last knell" sounded they were going for safety to the foot of the steep mountain, for the Saco had risen twenty-four feet in seven hours and threatened to engulf them in front.

Another spot of interest in the Notch is Nancy's Brook. It was at the point where this stream comes foaming from Mount Nancy into the great ravine that the girl whose name is given to it was found frozen to death in a shroud of snow in the fall of 1788. She had set out alone from Jefferson in search of a young farmer who was to have married her, and walked thirty miles through trackless snow between sunset and dawn. Then her strength gave out and she sank beside the road never to rise again. Her recreant lover went mad with remorse

when he learned the manner of her death and did not long survive her, and men who have traversed the savage passes of the Notch on chill nights in October have fancied that they heard, above the clash of the stream and whispering of the woods, long, shuddering groans mingled with despairing cries and gibbering laughter.

The birth of Peabody River came about from a cataclysm of less violent nature than some of the avalanches that have so scarred the mountains. In White's "History of New England," Mr. Peabody, for whom the stream is named, is reported as having taken shelter in an Indian cabin on the heights where the river has its source. During the night a loud roaring waked the occupants of the hut and they sprang forth, barely in time to save their lives; for, hardly had they gained the open ground before a cavern burst open in the hill and a flood of water gushed out, sweeping away the shelter and cutting a broad swath through the forest.

Although the Pilot Mountains are supposed to have taken their name from the fact that they served as landmarks to hunters who were seeking the Connecticut River from the Lancaster district, an old story is still told of one Willard, who was lost amid the defiles of this range, and nearly perished with hunger. While lying exhausted on the mountainside his dog would leave him every now and then and return after a couple of hours. Though Willard was half dead, he determined to use his last strength in following the animal, and as a result was led by a short cut to his own camp, where provisions were plenty, and where the intelligent creature had been going for food. The dog was christened Pilot, in honor of this service, and the whole range is thought by many to be named in his honor.

Waternomee Falls, on Hurricane Creek, at Warren, are bordered with rich moss where fairies used to dance and sing in the moonlight. These sprites were the reputed children of Indians that had been stolen from their wigwams and given to eat of fairy bread, that dwarfed and changed them in a moment. Barring their kidnapping practices the elves were an innocent and joyous people, and they sought more distant hiding-places in the wilderness when the stern churchmen and cruel rangers penetrated their sylvan precincts.

An old barrack story has it that Lieutenant Chamberlain, who fought under Lovewell, was pursued along the base of Melvin Peak by Indians and was almost in their grasp when he reached Ossipee Falls. It seemed as if there were no alternative between death by the tomahawk and death by a fall to the rocks below, for the chasm here is eighteen feet wide; but without stopping to reckon chances he put his strength into a running jump, and to the amazement of those in pursuit and perhaps to his own surprise he cleared the gap and escaped into the woods. The foremost of the Indians attempted the leap, but plunged to his death in the ravine.

The Eagle Range was said to be the abode, two hundred years ago, of a man of strange and venerable

appearance, whom the Indians regarded with superstitious awe and never tried to molest. He slept in a cave on the south slope and ranged the forest in search of game, muttering and gesturing to himself. He is thought to be identified with Thomas Crager, whose wife had been hanged in Salem as a witch, and whose only child had been stolen by Indians. After a long, vain search for the little one he gave way to a bitter moroseness, and avoided the habitations of civilized man and savages alike. It is a satisfaction to know that before he died he found his daughter, though she was the squaw of an Indian hunter and was living with his tribe on the shore of the St. Lawrence.

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