

MOONLIGHT IN A SOUTHERN FOREST

All around me the majestic pine trees raised their proud heads high into the vast dark blue dome of the heavens. The Southern moon, swollen to an enormous size, offered an uncanny contrast to the dark starless void about it, cast a soft ghostly radiance down through millions of dark green needles, and formed a beautiful silver and black chequered pattern on the thick carpet of milk weed and clover.

Here and there a jagged stump bore witness to the ruthless inroads of the woodsman. No sound but the soft whisper of the summer breeze through the boughs of the pine trees broke the sacred silence; and this seemed rather to add to the sacredness than to break it, for I could not resist the tendency to imagine in these whispers the prayers of the living trees for their departed brethren. Nay, these same whispers seemed rather to magnify the silence by contrasting it. Ay, silence was the word. Silence, silence, silence. Quiet, pacific, dreamy silence; charming, hypnotic, fascinating silence, and grim, weird, melancholy silence.

Suddenly, I became aware of a dark shadow flashing across the clearing in front of me. Intuitively, I looked, just in time to glimpse the fantastic silhouette of a leather-wing bat, which to my bewitched fancy appeared twice its real size. It was outlined clearly against the moon and very much resembled Old Nick in full flight as he is pictured in some of the early woodcuts. A cold chill leaped up my back and my hair seemed to stand on end. I knew this object to be a bat but somehow could not suppress the feeling of awe that gripped me.

Even before I fully recovered from this shock, I was again startled, this time well out of my senses, by the wildest, most uncanny, and most sinister noise the Southern forest has to offer. It seemed to rise and roll along the top of the trees until it reached the distant hills, and there, burst into a thousand echoes that hung in confusion for a few moments, quivered in the air, died, and left in its wake the eternal silence. It seemed to be a clear baritone voice angrily demanding to know:—

W-h-o-o-o-o-o-o ?

I knew that to be an owl, too. What Native Son of the South would not know that solitary call?—but never

had I heard it uttered before, with, what appeared to me, under the circumstances, so much vehement indignation and resentment.

So deeply was I impressed that I found myself rising from the stump where I had been sitting. I felt it inconsistent with the sacredness of my surroundings to remain seated, and so it was that as I gained my feet, I gazed off into the heavens, to where I felt Him to be from Whom all blessings flow. The result was inevitable. I next became aware of myself uttering an unconscious prayer. This discovery led me to throw myself on my knees, and as I did so, the cool breeze so characteristic of the southern summer nights wafted the sweet odor of wild violets to my nostrils and brought with it the nocturnal song of a dreaming mocking bird, whose random notes at such moments are infinitely sweeter and more musical than a million of the proverbial "Lost Chords" of Harmony. It appeared as though even these creatures of nature recognized the beauty of creation and offered thanks to the Creator. Truly, never in my life had I felt so close to my Creator as in this Southern Paradise.

—Reginald D. Thair.

Love all, trust few,
Do wrong to none; be able for thine enemy
Rather in power than use, and keep thy friend
Under thine own life's key; be check'd for silence,
But never taxed for speech.—*Shakespeare.*

Poets are all who love—who feel great truths,
And tell them.—*Bailey.*

Did charity prevail, the press would prove
A vehicle of virtue, truth and love.—*Cowper.*

Kindness has converted more sinners than either zeal,
eloquence, or learning.—*F. W. Faber.*