The Mysterious Lake.

A Southern Sketch: From the Note-Book of a Clergyman.

Some time ago, when I sent you Mr. Editor an account of that mysterious spring, The Wakulliah, I promised as you will remember further particulars of this wonderful land in which my lot is cast. In the performance of that promise I think of nothing which will interest you more than our near neighbor Lake Jackson, with which, I shall prove to be as self-willed and unreasonable a body of water for a lake as the Whigs fancy they have proved its illustrious namesake to have been as a president and a man.

Three years ago it was a beautiful sheet of water, extending north and south a distance of about seven miles, and varying in width from one to two. Its shores were uneven; sometimes rising abruptly to the height of forty or fifty feet, and sometimes running in a gentle slope from the water's edge to a considerable distance; but always they were beautiful. The sturdy live oak was there, casting its branches out with perfect abandon; looking as brave and free as the noble ship itself of which it some day will form a part. The grand magnolia was there, the monarch of the southern grove, to which the oak succumbed as the stout and serviceable yeoman bends to his slight but handsome and accomplished lord. These with the countless other trees which this climate produces, tied together with festoons of wild vines, and draped with bright gray moss, made its shores a resort for all who loved the beautiful and accomplished in nature. Nor was art entirely wanting. At an early period after the occupation of the country the neighboring planters, availing themselves of the many beautiful situations which its banks presented, built their houses on the high bluffs that overlooked the lake, and cultivated the grounds in filling gardens down to the water's edge. Two at least of these establishments would in all respects compare favorably with many in older countries; and in hospitality and good cheer they are certainly no where to be surpassed.

You have perceived that in all this description I have been speaking in the past tense; and you will ask, 'Why adopt this mode of telling your story?' You shall hear.

Two years ago the dwellers on the lake were startled to observe a strong current setting from all directions toward one or two particular spots. The waters were all greatly agitated, and strong eddies were caused. The level of the observed to be working where the currents met. The level of the water rapidly subsided several feet, then suddenly remained stationary for a few hours, and then fell again as the same mysterious currents set in from every side. This continued until the whole lake, with the exception of a few deep places here and there, was drained; and the poor fishes and other swimming and crawling things that 'do busi-
ammunition, I left the field and wandered off in search of the chasms of which I had heard so much.

I soon came to one of the gullies which traverse the bed of the lake. It was perfectly dry, but it was easy to tell from the appearance of the sand which way the waters had run; and walking down an imperceptible slope, a few hundred paces brought me to a kind of basin, in the farther side of which I saw the subterraneous opening. I could make nothing of it. I might as well have tried to study the constitution of the human brain by looking into the orifice of the external ear.

For about a foot there was a stratum of sand mixed with a rich loam, but then came the rough and jagged edges of crumbling limestone; and these were so irregular, and were so lapped one above another, that nothing more could be seen than six or seven feet below the surface.

The irregular shape of this aperture suggested to my mind the reason why the waters, as I mentioned above, suddenly ceased to flow. The fish and rubbish of all kinds which were carried down might easily have choked up the entrance, and for a time at least have obstructed the passage altogether. But why the waters should run away at all, or where they ran to, I found nothing to help me decide; nor has any one whom I have asked been able to tell. It is the general opinion here that the lake has committed this same feat at least once before, although none of the present generation remember any thing about it. A stump of a pine tree, which must have taken at least forty years to grow, is found in one of the lowest parts of the bed of the lake; and it is not too much to argue from this circumstance, that for so long a period, a great while ago, the place was bare of water. Beside this, I have been told that some Indian pans were found near one of the chasms, as if it had in old times been a camping-ground or spring.

But it is probable enough, without any proof except what is found in the nature of the strata of which this part of the earth is composed. After we got below the soil we came to a bed of ‘rotten limestone,’ which goes down nobody knows how deep. We have tried to get through it once or twice, in the attempts we have made at Artesian wells; and at once at least in the capitol-yard we got down several hundred feet; but it was a hopeless undertaking. We broke our augers, and our wise legislators have to content themselves with surface water instead of drinking it fresh from the antipodes.

Well, this vast body of limestone is nothing but a petrified honeycomb, and there are chambers enough in it to hold all the water that was ever drunk by the deserts of Zahara; of course therefore the only thing that is necessary when we desire to empty our lakes is to cut a hole in the bottom, and they sink. This unsoundness in our physical construction had the effect of frightening from among us a worthy immigrant from either the Granite or the Key-stone state. Finding no spring in his immediate neighborhood, his first care after ‘squatting’ on a desirable piece of the public domain, was to dig a well. He and his son John and his boy Jim in a few days got pretty well down into the bowels of the earth, and hoped that one day’s labor more would furnish them with a purer and clearer draught than they could get from the Branch, near half a mile away. Such were their attempts at night; for they had heard the sound of water, and a few more strokes they were certain would cut the vein and bring its volume into their well. But to their dismay they found next morning that the bottom of their well had fallen out, and a heavy current was moving lazily along and gradually undermining the ground on which they stood. It did not take them long to harness up their oxen, to throw their skins and kettle into their carts, and to ‘be movin’.

They were assured that hundreds of years might elapse before the earth would cave, but it was to no purpose; and I should not be surprised to hear that they are planting corn and roasting potatoes very near the place from which they originally came. But I am running away from my lake.

Aft after satisfying my curiosity, I betook myself of returning to the gallant Captain, and as the sun was nearly down, of setting our faces homeward. But it is an old experience that the descent to Avernus is an easier thing than to retrace your steps, and my fate was classical. To follow my footsteps in the sand was an easy thing enough; but when I came to the place where I entered the gully, there was the ‘opossum’ and the ‘labor.’ All around me and two feet above me I saw interminable fields of grass; and my passage through had left no more trace than that of the birds I had been seeking had done upon the air. Whichever way I turned was grass; and to continue the burlesque upon the hero, who is quite ‘nature’ to subterraneous thoughts, I could have confessed ‘me myself am grass,’ if it would at all have helped me out of the difficulty. I travelled on, not knowing whether I was right or wrong, occasionally firing off my powder and shouting always until I was completely tired out; and then I laid down upon an armful of the said grass and rested.

How long I should have remained there I do not know; but fortunately sportsmen came within hail, and in answer to my appeal, pointed out where the Captain and the horses were. I took the direction, and watching the sun, hurried to them. I had been going precisely wrong for more than a mile, and but for the sportsmen I should have been compelled to spend the night upon the lake. A short ride brought us to B—, where we had a comfortable dinner by candle-light, and then a long dark ride carried two tired people home. The next day the servant brought to us, nicely cleaned, the brant the Captain had bagged; but when I asked him for the snipe that I had shot, he declared they were only kidders!

Between you and me, Mr. Edmon, Tom ate those snipe himself!

Tallahassee, (Florida,) January 1842.

Yours, T. B.
AN APOLOGY FOR AUTHORS.

To young people of lively and romantic imaginations there is nothing so fascinating as the stage and those who tread it. Before the world has shed over them its chilling influence, and opened to their trustful minds its mortifying truths, they never believe that the hero of to-night may be the gambler or the set of to-morrow; still less that the graceful Viola or the tender Juliet who sighs and weeps in satin and diamonds, may be found at certain seasons quarrelling in the green-room like a tigress, or slip-shod and uncombed, conning her well-thumbed lesson in the den of a slattern. They know indeed that these people are not exactly the beings whose sentiments delight them, yet they cherish the grateful illusion that they must be at least souls of similar tone, or they could not give so movingly the touching thoughts of Ion or of Julia. They do not suppose a 'vocalist' to be eternally singing, or a 'tragedian' to sleep in his buskins; but it never enters their heads that these idols of their evening worship can at other times condescend to be more mortals like themselves, or — sadly unlike any thing so innocent.

The moment the mystery is unfolded, the illusion vanishes. The veil was the charm. The fitness of the actor for the 'genteel comedy' in which he made so shining a figure often becomes more doubtful when he attempts to play a corresponding part in real life; and he appears even more vulgar and commonplace than he would have done if we had seen him only in his own natural position and character. We are disappointed, and wish we had never been tempted to peep behind the scenes.

I am far from intending to institute any thing like a parallel between actors and authors; yet it has struck me that there is a degree of similarity in the feeling of disappointment which has so often been experienced till on a near view of the one and the other. Nothing can be more natural than the desire to enjoy the society of authors whose writings have pleased us. If the actor attracts the young, not less surely does the favorite author excite a feeling of interest in mature minds. We love the intelligent and suggestive companion of our quiet hours. We rank him among our benefactors, and we long for a nearer acquaintance. His person, his voice, his every-day habits and ordinary sentiments acquire a certain kind of importance, and for this reason those