

[*Portland Daily Advertiser*
September 12, 1849]
Correspondence of the Advertiser.

Bangor, August, 1849

Journey to Katahdin – Log Houses – Crossbills – Wild flowers – Camping out – Cry of the Moose.

Mount Katahdin, the highest summit of Maine had been from childhood associated with all my dreams of wild and magnificent scenery. Throned in the north amid frost and snows, amid old primeval forests, the haunt only of huge animals, who spurned the luxury of the level country and bid themselves amid its savage recesses, I had often brooded over the intense solitude and wished that some grand old legend of love or strife were mingled with its name; now I rejoice that Katahdin stand unassociated with the puny pulsations of human hearts, a solitary Wendigo, or Stone Giant, heavy with age and seamed with the scars of ages. I even half regret that a woman's foot has touched its height, and wish it had remained inaccessible even to me – for now the spell is broken and Katahdin will be the resort of idleness and gossip, and no longer the remote king of the north.

Our party consisted of Mr. and Mrs. M. and myself, and a guide who met us about ninety miles from Bangor. Leaving the above named city the road was upland through thrifty villages, of which I may speak hereafter, and over a road so picturesque, and withal so good in every point of view, that one constantly wished to be on horse back to enjoy it in full. Much of the way it runs parallel with the east branch of the Penobscot, which though now shrunken by the long continued drought is still a broad beautiful stream, dotted with island of rare loveliness, which are covered with the finest forest trees I had ever seen. The river is filled at present with logs, greatly to the detriment of people in this region whose wealth depends upon the lumber brought down by the many streams of the country; and when, as now, the season is too dry to float down the logs great inconvenience and stagnation of business ensues.

The islands to which I referred above belong entirely to the Indians of the Penobscot tribe and I was interested to observe many very good framed houses amongst them and some thrifty looking farms. The land is a steady rise from Bangor to Conway, so that as you look back from the top of the hills you have climbed, the scenery is grand beyond description. Rivers, lakes and mountains are spread out before you, all reposing amid the solemn and unbroken forces, which seems without stint or limit, and above all Katahdin looms into the sky with its bald top and yellow scars where the avalanches have ploughed their way. I counted nine of these distinctly upon one side visible from the road. Mars Hill, over which runs the demarkation line between us and Great Britain, is seen like a faint cloud in the horizon. Conway, or number two as it is called, is a Catholic township, in whose history I became much interested, and the priest, Mr. Moran, was found not only communicative, but intelligent and devoted to his people – With gentlemanly courtesy he took his won horse and carried a part of our company to the point of the road, where we must turn our backs on civilized life. Here taking our guide, and bidding adieu to the good priest we commenced the real hardships of the adventure to Katahdin. The road turns sharply to the left, and is simply a passage between the stumps of trees; where a marsh intervenes logs are laid transversely, making what is called a "gridiron road," or "corduroy turnpike," or whatever a whimsical fancy may suggest but one of the most abominable modes of jostling and shaking human bodies you can conceive of. Mrs. M. and myself made ourselves not a little merry as our wagon in some cases jolted a quarter of a mile over these logs, throwing us into attitudes

unconceived of by the Graces, and we certainly did rejoice when this mode of shaking was exchanged for the variety of a plunge over bowlders, stumps, and the immense roots of trees which shot across our path. But overhead the scene was magnificent – immense primeval trees shot up into the sky which was blue and serene; the singing of birds, the busy chatterings of the squirrels, and the shy movements of partridges darting across the road wrought a soothing and harmonious influence upon our spirits. Katahdin was before us, the wicked noisy world cast behind our backs, and nature seemed to spread forth her arms lovingly to receive us.

We passed one or two log houses, but by no means wearing the aspect of poverty. There were the hardy pioneers of the wilderness, who sought here independence for themselves and children, and the “clearings” gave evidence of their hardihood and perseverance. After traveling about six miles over the worst road I had then ever seen, we came to a thrifty clearing, where an intelligent looking man shouldered his axe to assist us in crossing a stream, for the fires were raging in the woods through which our course lay, and the bridge had been burned. There was a melancholy dignity in the air of this man which could not fail to interest. He was accompanied by a little boy of perhaps five years, whose delicate beauty attracted my attention. My remarks touched the heart of the father and then he told me the story of his rare and beautiful child, which had sickened and died a few months before. It was the story so often told by our early settlers, of wild-wood solitude, of patient endurance, and bereaved affection. I could see that the loneliness of nature had failed to soothe; but rather that she laid her hand heavily upon the stricken head in times like these and thence grief was protracted beyond its just dues.

Reaching the current whose babblings had been for some time audible, we found the ground all about blazing and scorching beneath our feet, while the heat and smoke were nearly suffocating. With much difficulty we were able to get the horse and wagon across, while my lady companion and I prided ourselves much on the skill with which we forded the stream. Our guide facetiously remarked that “our courage was good, for we went through fire and water at the first start.” Subsequently when we were compelled to ford rivers, we laughed heartily at our little glorification in fording this brook. But this was our day of small things.

Four miles more brought us to “Hunt’s” the last house on the road. Hunt’s is the “Johnny Grouts” of this region. What “old Crawford” used to be to the White Hills, Hunt is to Katahdin. He has a fine thrifty farm with corn fields up into the side of a mountain, the east branch of the Penobscot flows by his door, with a green slope, “green to the very threshold” down to the river brim. It is a wild picturesque spot, and beautiful withal – the river sweeps by in graceful course, the mountains rise from the opposite side, and it is just that broken, Swiss kind of view so delightful to the eye of an Artist. Added to this the table was excellent, with hot cakes, salmon and other comforts to a traveler – the beds coarse but cleanly, the family obliging, and the reader will see that “Hunt’s” is by no means an undesirable place – We noticed innumerable Crossbills flying about with an appearance of great zeal and preoccupation; it was cherry time, reminding one of prim gossiping little quakers with a touch of fancy about their drab coats, and a smart holding of high crowned caps. The sun was warm, the air bland, and altogether Hunt’s farm wore an air of exceeding comfort.

A bateau propelled by Mr. M and our guide, carried us up the Penobscot a few miles into the Wisatticook, a deep, rapid stream with water as clear and cold as crystal. We sang songs, and poured out libations to the mountain nymph, and the Genii Loci, as cheerful a party as ever passed this wild region – peculiar indeed we were, for women had never before penetrated thus far into this wilderness. Leaving the boat and certain articles superfluous in a savage life, we struck at once into the woods. It was a magnificent primeval growth of hard wood, which is of

little value in this part of the country and has therefore been left intact; there is but little undergrowth and the scene wears the appearance of a superb park, the trees nearly excluding the sky. We passed ferns the most beautiful to be conceived, often five and six feet high. The botany was throughout interesting – berries of the richest hue clustered about our feet; the Indian pipe, like a pearl moulded into blossom, gathered itself into lovely clusters, and the Dragon’s tongue, and Solomon’s seal showed that sentiment might here find abundance of language, while the Pitcher Plant, filled with its pure liquid, told how lovingly and providently the good Father spreads a table in the wilderness.

Presently the trees swaying back and forth with a great noise, and the fitful moanings of the wind told of a gathering storm. The rain began to fall like shot upon the branches of the trees, and we realized to the full the comfort of our well wadded woodland dress. The tent was pitched for the night – an immense fire kindled in front – and green branches spread for our bed. A camp in the deep woods is suggestive of a thousand whimsical associations, and jest, story and song came as freely as the free airs that surrounded us. How eloquent we grew in those rude encampments! how readily and daintily pleasant thoughts careened about us; and language sprang spontaneously even to reserved lips.

Our guide, Mr. Haines, was perfect in all woodland expedients – hung a crane in Indian style, and made excellent tea in the *tea-kettle*; constructed pretty spoons from alder bark, and by no means contemptible platters and plates from the integuments of larger trees. Then he manufactured nice napkins from the inner fold of the birch tree, and even in an idle and luxurious hour prepared us no mean quantity of birch bark stationery, *cards and note paper*, upon which we wrote letters to our friends and prepared visiting cards, dated Mount Katahdin. He sang too, a good song, and was altogether the very prince of guides. He had been much in this part of the century exploring, for he is a man well-to-do in the world, and had camped out for months together.

But I am anticipating. Gradually the awe of our position grew upon us and all were silent. I looked out into the black night and saw the sparks ascending into the vault of this vast and sublime cathedral; arch beyond arch, up, into the overhanging heavens and saw how puny were the buildings made with human hands, compared with this framed by the handy-work of the Eternal. – The pattering of the rain – the surgings of the forest and our own isolation, and littleness, filled me with a sense of the most intense and helpless solitude, such as language would fail to express. I gathered the fold of our tent drapery about me and strove to shut out the images that were growing too wild and oppressive.

I must have slept, for I was startled by a cry so distinct and near, with the crashing of the limbs of trees, that we all started in our feet and the gentlemen seized their fire-arms for defence. I, I am ashamed to say, with a most unfeminine instinct, unsheathed a dirk, which I had at my side, and grasped it in a very determined manner. The cry continued to recede, and presently all was still. – The men laid down their arms, and I closed my dirk with hand, shame on my courage, trembling in a manner that set my femininity quite at rest.

The voice was that of Moose, more than one having undoubtedly passed very near our night lodging. The cry was some thing between the low of an ox, and the quick winding of a horn; and to me, in that dense solitary woods, was one of the most startling yet melancholy sounds I ever heard; it was majestic, too, as if the lordly denizens of the place questioned why we intruded upon their province.

My letter is growing too long, and I must defer Katahdin for another number.

A PILGRIM

[September 15, 1849]

Correspondence of the Advertiser.

Bangor, Aug. 1849

Roads to Katahdin – Marshes – The office of mosses—Solitary Lake – Fording Sandy Brook – Roach Lake – Katahdin ten miles from the Mountain.

With our night of slumber, all sense of fatigue had passed away. I am convinced people do not take cold from exposures of this kind, unless laboring from some organic disease, in which case they should never hazard the experiment, but content themselves with the sickly air of warm rooms and flannels, and leave the luxury of hemlock boughs and free mountain firs for those whose better decent or better training has given courageous nerves, and elastic limbs, such as blessed the pair in paradise, who started from sleep

Light and airy, from pure digestion bred
And temperate vapors bland

Our way led through the same interminable forest, constantly rising – for we had more than one mountain to surmount before we should reach Katahdin. A rough path had been marked out by explorers and designated by a cleft from the bark of trees, right and left, at intervals, called the “spots” or “blazes.” We each grew expert in tracing our path by these marks and followed on, mile and mile on foot, (for horses were dispensed with from the time we reached Hunt’s) now climbing over windfalls, where the trees were prostrate at every conceivable inclination, and no small skill and activity were requisite in surmounting them; anon a dip of the hill would lead us in to a ravine, stagnant with water, in which we could trace the tracks of wild animals which had passed a few moments before. These marshes were black uncannie looking places, threaded with roots of trees, and fallen trunks, slippery to the tread, and yet if we except the clumps of coarse grass, affording the only foot hold for miles together. We moved on by a sort of hop-skip and jump, sometimes coming up short in a very uncomely black pool, from which we emerged merrily. – How we overcame our womanly horror of snakes I know not, but so it was; and we would travel on as demurely in this rough untidy road as if we had never known the luxury of the green earth or the comfort of cleanly sidewalks. The truth is, and the truth must be told, we were not blest with the sight of a single huge or terrible animal, did not come up to the dignity even of a snake; and in this dearth of adventure we made much ado when an owl flitted through the trees; but, when an eagle that kingly suggestor of Freedom, grandeur and daring, sailed over our heads, dotting with his shadow some still, mountain cinctured lake, and soaring away over rock and fell and forest, disappeared amid the mist and shadows of Katahdin, I felt my blood stirred and a lofty exultation mingled with his stately image. Then two squirrels would now and then come out, and sit upon an old stump and chatter to us defiantly – turn about to the limb of a tree, and then suddenly whisk round and chatter again, as if taken with a new thought. Pretty lizards crept amongst the mosses, and now and then a bird poured out its soulful life in song. But this was rare and gave an impression of deeper loneliness. The singing of a bird was oppressive, while the quivering cry of the loon, across the lake, and the sharp stream of birds of prey were in harmony with the savageness of nature.

I remember we took our dinner one day beside a small lake surrounded with birches. Now the blue shade of the larch is gloomy of itself, and the stiff angular branches have a forbidding, unpitying look; the Lake had a small outlet just visible where a flock of ducks made their escape in a streak of sunshine behind the branches. We were in a small amphitheatre where these somber trees had stepped down the hill side into the dip of the water; the leaves of the

beautiful “pond lilly” (*nympha alba*) were lying thickly upon the surface, but alas! not a blossom was left, nothing but the yellow beaver plant, which always grows beside the lilly, an old duenna guarding its loneliness. Dragon flies, with their gossamer wings darted about and the rough voice of the locust broke harshly upon the ear. The sky was one blue, changeless and hushed. I could scarcely eat, so melancholy were the images presented. It seemed a little Acheron, and we were miserable spirits lowering about its ghostly shores.

Indeed, constantly as we advanced into the wilderness we were impressed with the intense and unbroken stillness of nature. The animals in this vast solitude are huge solitary creatures, delighting in the ragged cliff and seeking the forest only when in need of food or shelter. The races of them were upon every side of us, and at night their wild startling cry was audible, but day after day we traveled without encountering a living creature. The woods were all primeval excepting now and then an interval through which fires had passed, and through these, we found it difficult to make our way owing to the dense growth and lowness of the branches, while the primeval woods were stately monarchs towering into the sky and leaving a free passage beneath. To add to the silence of the forest, the mosses of this region are exceedingly beautiful and abundant, and everything is draped over with them. Huge boulders rising to the height of twenty or thirty feet, have their threatening aspects softened by this luxuriant growth – while those of smaller size are bound captive to the soil by the cable roots of immense trees, over all which the silent mosses have spread their covering. Hoary old trees and growth and decay of centuries lie prostrate and draped for the burial, by their pitying and unpretending love, as if the whole sentiment of nature were to veil the ravages of death, and hide what is unseemly even from its own eyes.

As we walked for hours nearly in silence through those immense solitudes, how lovely, how refreshing were the gleams of mountain torrents, and how ennobling the aspect of Katahdin as he rose monarch-like in the distance; occasionally we would come to an old camp, where travelers had passed before us, and a sympathizing tenderness grew upon us as we looked upon these fading vestiges of our kind – a piece of decaying flannel the foot of a stocking, homely relics indeed, were they, but we had been camping our night after night, unchecked with any faces but our own active group, and these things we quietly compared to the foot-prints of Robinson Crusoe, and whimsically created the history of their adventures.

Our path for many miles lay along the course of the Wisatticook, one of the coldest, clearest, and loveliest of rivers; indeed for bathing, nothing can be more luxurious than the rivers of Katahdin; as limpid as the air itself, and affording nooks and dells which a Grecian fancy would people with dainty Nymphs and piping Satyrs. Slips of white sand, like a scroll, unrolled from the verge of the forest to the water’s brim, tempt the foot to disport therein and make the morning toilet where Titania herself might have been enchanted, and which Dian might seek for the sake of seclusion. Often in moving silently through the bushed wilderness, these beautiful myths would crowd upon the fancy, making one desire belief therein. And indeed, I yielded full credence to Pan, who has found an asylum from his desecrated shrine amid the savage grandeur of Katahdin. Often did I behold his melancholy face peering from behind some huge and moss-grown rock, and I caught a gleam of his hurrying hoofs at some lonely fountain, and saw the branches close and quiver behind him; while off on the hill-side where the sunlight glinted amid the leaves, and lighted the boles of ancient oaks and beechen trees, the sad cadence of his pipes mingled with the many voices that come to the internal ear, “Alas! I had heard Pan!”

Fording the Wisatticook, which here runs a rapid stream of more than a hundred feet in width, our way grew more solitary, and the traveling exceedingly laborious. We averaged from

five to eight miles a day, which ought to be a trifle to a healthful woman, properly dressed for the occasion; but this distance notwithstanding all our comfortable preparations, left us nearly exhausted, and never was sleep more ready or more refreshing than we found it at night on our hemlock boughs. As we grew further into this mountainous region, frequent rains and hurried showers kept us wet half the time, while the black flies were a perpetual annoyance; to counteract the rain, we fitted ourselves shoulder pieces of birch bark; and to escape the flies and mosquitoes, wore a napkin loosely over the head, which we wet in the many streams we were obliged to cross – our traveling caps in the meanwhile being suspended upon the arm. This wet covering for the head had a two-fold advantage – the moisture was repugnant to the minges and black flies, and as our feet were half the time wet, it preserved the balance of circulation.

We grew very courageous in fording streams, and learned to balance over slippery logs and decaying trees quite to the admiration of our guide, who seeing me take a pole and walk the trees, a single trunk in width, which constituted the only bridge over Sandy brook, declared I was “nearly as good at it as a river driver,” a praise which I liked right well, as helplessness and nervousness form no part of my feminine creed. Now Sandy brook, which we crossed several times, is deeper, broader, and more rapid than the Saco in any place where it has to be crossed on the route to Mount Washington, and a trip to the mountains of New Hampshire is a summer-day excursion, a baby play compared to Katahdin.

We had been so long buried in the heart of the forest that when we emerged upon Lake Katahdin, ten miles from the mountain, the sensation was delightful beyond expression. The Lake was a lovely sheet of water embowered in woods, the curves and inlets exceedingly graceful and picturesque, and the expanse sleeping under a saffron and rose tinged atmosphere, with here and there a dimple where a fish darted to the light. In front of us rose Katahdin, without a cloud, resting against the sky like the battlements of the Eternal, while hill and mountain flanked his throne far as the eye could reach. Katahdin is not a range, one of a group, but a solitary peak the highest in the State, and casting the lesser points quite beneath his feet.

It is this singleness of position that imparts so much of interest and grandeur to this northern height. There is one ravine upon the rim which at a distance looks like the crater of a volcano. Mr. M. found some fossils and a substance marvelously resembling lava, but I am not geologist enough to pronounce upon these matters.

Mrs. M. and myself amused ourselves by “luring the scaly tribe,” while the gentlemen prepared the tent, fires and supper; we wrapped our fish in pocket-handkerchiefs to still their struggles, and flinched not a little as we took the poor things from the hook, the sport *is* a cruel one despite our enthusiasm for Isaak Walton, and my own individual penchant that way. While busied in this way the twilight shadows deepened, and the mountains seemed to approximate like stony ramparts shutting us out from the world. Suddenly a heavy plunge as of some immense body into the water, and I am afraid likewise, two very decided and emphatic screams broke the stillness of the night and caused the very stars to wince with mortification. We hurried to our tents, and kept up a reserved and disguised aspect to counteract this slight lapsing of womanly courage. All night at intervals the call of the moose, the prolonged cry of the loon, and the screaming of the owl gave us a gloomy cast to the hours, while in the morning the Lake wore again its cheerful aspect – if cheerful it can be in the midst of creatures which seek remoteness and solitude. The eagle and the hawk sailed away into the humid air, and ducks and geese dived at our approach. Old Katahdin showed but a meagre view, for he was enveloped in clouds, which curled about his hoary head, and rose up in endless shapes white and beautiful, and moving in the distance like an army of Ossian’s shadowy ghosts, ancient, and silent warriors hastening to

their vapory hells. A rain cloud after giving us a morning salutation, swept down to the low country, trailing a rainbow behind it, festooning lake and forest with rare loveliness, as if the beautiful Isis would lure us from this savage region.

A PILGRIM

[September 26, 1849]

(Correspondence of the Advertiser.)

Bangor, Sept. 1849.

Avalanche Brook – The Indian Camp – A night upon Katahdin – Rain – Intense Cold – Difficulty of procuring a Fire.

Our way led us aside from the Lake again through the forest. The ascent began to be more precipitous and rocky, and the whole route seemed little else than Innumerable pathways for the deer and moose, traces of whom were as palpable as those of cattle about a farm house. The trees were gnawed by their teeth, and semi-circles in the bushes showed where they were in the habit of grouping together. The trees growing stunted, with wide horizontal branches impeding the way, and but for these paths, worn hard by wild animals, would have been utterly impassable. At length the roaring of waters that had been increasing on the ear, warned us of the proximity of Avalanche Brook. I dare not describe a creature so wildly beautiful as this mountain Undine. Imagine a rocky chasm as if a seam had been opened into the side of the mountain, laying bare rocks of vast size, and crowded together in every conceivable way; now, two or three pressed into a narrow space, with the green boughs clasping above, and leaving a perpendicular descent of many feet below; then spreading away with twenty of these chasms side by side, arched, sloping or precipitous, as if some playful giant were preparing the prettiest possible bed for a torrent; working in wild wantonness three miles together; carving, and dipping, and climbing up a steep so sharp that bodies will “stay put” and only so. Then imagine the riotous waters of the mountain to leap from their concealment, roaring and dashing, boiling and foaming their downward way – plunging over steeps, reveling in eddies, and laughing from rock to rock; and you have Avalanche Brook.

And now our way led, not by the side of this torrent, but directly up its bed. The trees were so thick and low upon each side, and the ground so irregular, and cumbered with fragments from the mountain, that ascent was impossible in any other way. It was a merry sight to see us leaping from rock to rock, springing over these surging and roaring cataracts for three long miles; and truth to say, it grew to be no holiday task, for ancles will be ancles, in spite of resolution and careful “findings;” but when our spirits flagged, a look upward at the sportful Nymph above, or below where she disported amid the shadows and with frolicsome grace sang onward in a torrent of melody, so invigorated our hearts and sent new beauty into our souls, that we clapped our hands and sang, and called to the mountain echoes, as if we had become a part of this exulting jubilant Oh! one hour of life like this, is worth an eternity amid the dust and dulness of cities.

At length the brook diverged, and we clambered the bank in search of a foothold for the night which was no easy matter to find, owing to the precipitous nature of the ground. In doing this, we came upon an old Indian camp, and a winter camp, judging from the height of the stumps which they had cut for wood. The trees here are birch, small and stunted, making a wretched material for fire, yet these were cut five and six feet from the ground, indicating a heavy mass of snow at the time they were felled. The occupants must have suffered terribly in wintering in a place like this, for we in August found the damp air set in motion by the strong winds of this region exceedingly cold and uncomfortable; and what motive could have induced a human being to brave it in December, it would be hard to divine. Sad, affecting images of sickness, peril and human suffering in their many shapes, suggested themselves to the mind, but the truth is garnered away in that great book wherein are recorded the destinies of those who are accounted worthy to suffer.

At length an area, a sort of shelf in the side of the mountain was selected for our night's encampment; a rude broken spot it was, within the roar of the cataract, and disjointed rocks and stunted trees; where we were more than once startled by the cry of Moose and the ominous voice of the owl. It was difficult to feed the fire, and the night was cold, so that the masculines must have had a most uncomfortable night of it. Morning at length dawned, cold and rainy; Mrs. M. and myself remained in camp while Mr. M. accompanied the guide in quest of adventure. No fruit was to be found excepting cranberries, so that we could not expect much in that line. However, wrapped well up we passed our time most agreeably – I, with the afore mentioned dirk, and a loaded pistol by my side, which I wisely determined not to use unless some wild beast should give us more than a friendly stare. We amused ourselves in filling out cards of bark, dated Mount Katahdin, and writing letters upon birch bark to our friends five or six thousand feet below us, on the earth's surface, whatever might be their elevation in other respects. Then we wrote a letter to be left upon the top of the mountain and enclosed it with our cards in a bottle for the next visitors, desiring them to do the same, and thus establish a literature and Post Office upon Katahdin. In this letter we modestly asserted our right to the distinction of being the first woman, who had ever set foot upon the mountain, and in a manner pledged that our memories shall not be unworthy of its lofty associations.

While buried in this way a tremendous cracking and crashing of branches below our tent caused me to lay my hand gently upon the pistol, and if ever eyes did good service ours were wide awake at this moment. But the sounds died away and I resumed my pen with a slight tremor of the nerves not favorable to elegance of chirography. Our companions had started a bear of large size further up, and he probably made a sweep to the bed of the stream to avoid our tent. The guide presented me a little paw of a rabbit which had probably served as a tidbit for the monster.

The weather having cleared up at noon we continued our escort a portion of the way through this stunted shrubbery which never disappeared and we climbed the bold side of the mountain with only here and there an old root scattered by the tempest, and small cranberries threading themselves like emeralds and rubies along the velvet mosses. We were obliged to climb a long distance up the dry bed of an avalanche, than which I can conceive of nothing more fatiguing, or more savage in aspect. The soil was so loose that our feet slipped backward in the sand, and the huge rocks seemed every moment ready to topple down and crush us beneath them. Indeed a misstep would have been perilous if not fatal, for often these rocks shook and swayed at the touch, and a circuit must be made to avoid their fall. The ascent is so steep that the hands are in constant requisition, and how these loose mosses keep their position at all, looked a mystery till one saw how the whole was wedged and jammed together, and routed to some huge foundation of the "everlasting hills."

Right glad we were to reach to the top of the avalanche and climb by the surer sides of the mountain, although all vegetation except mosses had disappeared, and the cold winds swept by like a hurricane threatening to throw us from our hazardous position. Never was such a wind; so ferociously penetrating, and clipping one about with sudden whirls, as if some malicious mountain imp were bent upon casting us down headlong. Our guide declared that these winds "had blown the granite rocks to pieces," which we could readily conceive; and these rocks do wear a singular appearance, being often in heaps so shattered and worn, that their disintegration resembles a sort of "head cheese" badly formed, (we hope the reader appreciates the elegance of the comparison,) which a child could pick to pieces with his fingers.

It was now nearly sunset, and we had climbed thus late in the hope of seeing the sun rise and set from the summit. The masses of clouds which had more than once scattered pearls from their retiring skirts upon our heads, were disporting capriciously with old Katahdin, now veiling his bald head, and now leaving his rough honest face open to the lesser hills, and yet threatening to cover him for the night, with their many folds. We turned and looked backward to the country below. There was one grand moment of exultation, of wild sympathy with this savage inhospitable height – this eternal rock, vast and Promethean with its un pitying blasts, and enduring cold. Human feelings were merged in the magnificence of this overwhelming solitude, where the voice of man is a feeble reed, shorn and echoless and only mountain calling to its brother disturbs the death-like repose.

---- ----- “Jura from his misty shroud
Calls to the listening Alps, that cry to him aloud.”

It was but a moment, and then I looked where, the clouds were settling like an immense banner down upon our heads, and how lovely looked the vale below; how yearningly the heart pleaded for its lowliness, its homely comfort. There we were at this cold elevation with not one ray of sun-light and the tempest gathering and sweeping about us, while below, beautiful lakes, green slopes, undulating forests, and far, far off a cultivated opening, were all bathed in the genial sunshine, sleeping in tranquil beauty, below the tempest, and the still biting frost. It was a sad, symbolic view, too obvious to be mistaken – it is thus greatness is achieved by patient toil upward, and such is its isolation.

The view from the summit of Katahdin is indeed sublime – and though we had but a momentary and imperfect gleam, it is one to live and grow upon the memory. Mountains spread in the distance, Moosehead Lake fifty miles to the west shows its rare beauty, and Chesuncook, with its hundred isles; the Twin Lakes, whose Indian cognomen I have forgotten, and Katahdin Lake ten miles in the distance, which looked as if one might toss a pebble into it. These lakes and rivers, including the east and west branches of the Penobscot, are beautiful indeed, but solitary images, with not a vestige of civilization, and the prevailing impression from Mt. Katahdin is one of immense and desolate grandeur. The unbroken sweep of forest lies low, and the irregularities so hidden in space, that the idea of trees is lost and looks like a smooth lawn with varied and striking shades of greenness.

We were witness to one beautiful atmospheric to be a gigantic rock, with perpendicular sides adown which streamed trailings of the wild vine, and from the top arose a crown of lofty trees. Gradually the light changed and we found this to be a gem-like lake, the waters of which had looked like a white granite surface, and its fringe of trees had made the vines. These little lakes are often exceedingly beautiful. Sometimes we passed them in the shape of pools not more than eighteen feet across, perfectly limpid and embowered in trees, the most lovely and tempting basins for a bath imaginable.

The clouds that had been hovering over us gradually shut us in as it were, descending like a marked line, and the sheet of light in the country below narrowed imperceptibly like the girdle of the White Lady of Avenal, till it wasted away, and we were left, not to a dim twilight, but almost total blackness. I could hardly have conceived a change so sudden and entire – the wind continued to increase, and the rain fell fitfully, now it was a dense mist so penetrating that nothing could resist it, and now it poured in great drops, yet unheard for the wind howled through the fissures of the rocks and the moss was nearly a foot in height, ready to muffle any sound even if the winds should chance to be silent. And now with much difficulty the tent was held to the ground by huge stones, leaving us room only to breathe, for not a stick could be found

in the vicinity, and we were in danger of being swept off by the wind. After hours of severe toil and difficulty our companions were able to collect from the sides of the mountain below, a few withered roots of trees in the hopes of building us a fire, a need which we should have escaped in ordinary weather, so well we were provided with blankets for the occasion, but now the intense cold and heavy rain promised to be more than we could endure. I said internally, "it is one of those ugly *Friday* nights, which never bode good to anybody." Friday is and ought to be banned by every good christian, and I made a new vow to regard it as such in all times to come, and never hope good therefrom. Cowards have been known to shake when not able to run from the battle-field – orators shake in their shoes, and poets behind their maiden blushes – Caesar shook with the ague, Byron from swimming the Hellespont, -- Belshazzar's knees smote together – but these and all imaginable shakings cannot compare with ours upon Katahdin. I had been recently ill from a fever and my teeth loosened thereby, were hardly firm in my head. Surely said I, not a tooth will be left, and yet they kept such a chattering as indicated a tolerable hold. We tried to be cheerful but our looks must have been ghostly enough. The blood retired from our heads and feet and cramps began to assail us. These were terrible, and for awhile I solemnly thought I should never survive till morning; a stiff faint feeling made me dull and the sounds that syllable men's names, crept along the mountain, then my mind grew into fearful activity, and lent a new vigor to my blood. I remember some one has said, "as a man dies, so the world thinks of him," a death upon Katahdin! The everlasting hills for a Mausoleum! But what was the motive that impelled to this height? The good of science? The journeying of a great mission to carry light and truth and love to benighted human minds? Alas! Alas! Will a single heart be lifted to aspiration by the toil I have encountered? shall I breathe into these records a single thought of a nobleness and beauty that shall become a watchword or incitement to another? God knows, -- and with him let it rest. I was not to perish upon Katahdin, a destiny like that is the award of singleness of aim, and abnegation of self, and my thoughts clung too tenaciously to life and its many hopes, and loves, and claims, to desert me now

Oh what is life, when but one *hope* remains!
The sea-borne wretch in icy regions bound
Lights first the quivering flame with anxious pains,
Spreads wide his wasted hands to shield it round –
Gathers the stunted shrub to feed the spark –
Fans with his breath, and trembling stirs it o'er
And thus puts out with over care – the dark,
Cold vapor shuts him in, and he awakes no more.

It was thus I felt as we watched Mr. M. and the guide in their efforts to light a fire. The matches had become damp by the mountain mist, and although they had resorted to the Yankee expedient of whittling some splinters from the old roots, which they had collected, yet the pouring rain and gusty winds afforded but a poor prospect. Added to this the hands of the men shook like an ague, (no shame to their manhood,) from the cold, and though I have since laughed at the unsuccessful efforts of the two, in bringing their hands to a juxtaposition, at the time I never was conscious of a more intense and terrible anxiety, as match after match flickered and expired. At length I bethought me of some writing paper and slips of thin birch bark, which I had in my pocket, and with these after many efforts a flame was kindled. The wind whirled the smoke and sparks into our faces, but we were too grateful for the warmth to murmur. With the first beam of light, we deposited the bottle containing our letter in a cleft of a rock, and hastened our departure in a torrent of wind and rain. The descent of the mountain though nothing as laborious as the ascent,

is still not without its perils owing to the loose nature of the soil, rocks and sand giving way and following the retreating foot.

We remained in our camp till noon, too much exhausted to move. The rain poured incessantly, and the roar of the Avalanch Brook increased in volume. We were still far up the mountain in the midst of stunted birches, which afforded but little comparative warmth. The rain which had continued to pour down all night, had by this time so swollen Avalanch Brook, that we began to entertain fears that the other streams would be impassible. So at mid-day we again took up our uncomfortable march, abandoning all hope of being screened from the rain, we only sought by rapid movements to counteract its ill effect. Accordingly, we walked boldly down Avalanch Brook, now a deep rapid current, so strong as often to nearly lift our feet from beneath us. We leaped chasms and forded shallows and crawled down falls, for three long laborious miles, and then struck across the country for the west branch of Sandy Brook. Here we found a nice log camp, and our guide, who had preceded us, had prepared the canvas covering, and a good fire was glowing amid the trees. Never was anything more cheering, the rain had fallen without intermission, and we had traveled an unwonted distance, so that fresh garments and a bed in this wilderness, though comprised of boughs dried with much labor over the fire, were most welcome to us. It was now late Saturday night, and here we determined to pass the Sabbath and recover from fatigue.

A PILGRIM

[October 8, 1849]
Correspondence of the Advertiser
Bangor, Sept. 1849

Katahdin Letters – Aboriginal superstition in regard to Katahdin – Idea of a Prometheus – Sabbath in the wilderness – Attachment to our wooden lodge – Return to Hunt's.

It was late Saturday night when we stopped and made our camp on the banks of Sandy Brook, now swollen and turbid from the rain which continued to fall without intermission. We were thoroughly wet, tired and most of us hungry, our provisions nearly exhausted and no prospect of fair weather. Fortunately for myself, I was too much fatigued to eat, and needed nothing but the great restorative, sleep, which evaded me for many hours in consequence of a severe headache. I shrank from the uproar of the elements, faint and oppressed. Nature was too mighty for my womanly nerves, and I felt ashamed of a growing imbecility, and wondered after all if I really had the true spirit by which dangers and hardships are confronted as if they were not much. Sleep gradually stole over me before I came to any reconciliation with myself, leaving me to climb innumerable mountains and encounter myriads of woodland monsters, in sleep-land.

At midnight I awoke refreshed and joyful. The party was asleep – our camp fire burning brightly and the dancing sparks upheaving into the midst of the rain drops. The wind swept in mighty gusts through the forest, wrestling with the huge branches, and dying away in shrieks and moans, till another and another, giant voiced, drowned the wailings of its compeer. Rocks forced from the bed of the stream above, came booming down the falls of the Brook, with a sound resembling the rambling of thunder, or the distant roar of artillery, laying the ear to the ground as we did on our bed of green branches, all these sounds were magnified, and yet entirely unlike those on the top of the mountain.

There we heard whisperings, gurglings, low rumbling sounds as if the place were alive with mysterious agents, who came and went talking to their fellows. It required no stretch of fancy to imagine the mountain full of beings who took council together – and I did not wonder that the poor Indian believed it to be the great resort of Evil Spirits – the home of Nachinito, whose power was counteracted only by the perpetual vigilance of the Master of Life. Indeed the Aborigines tremble with dread even at the name of Katahdin, are unwilling to talk of the word or its signification, and the boldest among them are silent and awe-struck as they approach the vicinity. Their eyes dilate, they become rigid, taciturn, and apparently absorbed in secret incantations by which the evil spirits are to be appeased. They have a tradition that two hostile tribes met by accident in one of the many lakes of Katahdin, and a battle in canoes ensued, which left scarcely a man to tell of the disasters of the fight. To this day they pass these lakes in total silence, for the dead are sleeping beneath, and the mountain is filled with the hovering ghosts of men, who were never gathered dust to dust – for the Indian, like the ancient Greek, believes in the need of burial to ensure the repose of the soul, and stories, beautiful as the devotion of Antigone, might be told of these children of the woods. Katahdin is indeed the place for these awful associations; a solitary peak such as one would conceive worthy to be the prison house of the mighty Titan; and the top fit for the chained Prometheus, above whose untold agonies beat the un pitying elements, and roared, and screamed the moody vultures of the wilderness. Were I an Artist I would copy the rock as it is – fancy can lend it no aid – paint it hoary with the seers of ages, savage – lone, -- the landscape beneath dwindled to a smooth surface with a faint tinge of warm sunshine upon the lake, to contrast with the smoky vapors driven about the mountain, with

the dim outline of a vulture amid the folds; and then bring the whole imagination to frame a fitting attitude for the daring yet benign creature of mystery, who shadows forth an inconceivable good; -- an attitude that shall leave him, less subject to the vengeance of the Gods, than of a terrible fate; the chain made powerless by the sublime endurance of the sufferer. Prometheus would be a world-wide myth, and Katahdin be upon canvas what it is on the face of nature. Cole has left us a Prometheus, but his imagination; though beautiful and faithful to nature, was not sublime -- his craig is unworthy of the subject and his chained giant looks like a contorted pigmy.

At early dawn our guide left us, while he returned to Wisatticook river for provisions which we had left there for our homeward journey. It still rained though less violently, and partly caused by fatigue, and partly the absence of food we were dull and inclined to sleep. Towards noon the rain cleared up, the blue sky showed itself through the trees, and clouds white and floating hurried in crowded battalions to the stormy top of Katahdin, from where we could hear the distant peaks of the thunder storm. It was indeed a lovely Sabbath day quiet, which now settled around us. No church-going bell urged the summons to prayer; no cathedral hymn pealed through the fretted miles of a house made with hands; but that heart must have been dull indeed not to feel the holier and higher promptings that steal into it amid the solitudes of the desert and incite to worship. It was in scenes like these, that the earlier devotees for the truth went up their trembling aspirations, seeking the purer worship in God's own temple; living in the wilderness, scattered and exiled, rather than debase the soul with the grosser forms of their persecutors, and those who live nearest to the truth need least the friction of other minds to evoke their highest emotions.

It was just four in the afternoon when our guide returned with provisions and the addition of a string of partridges to add a zest to our woodland feast. To say we had grown hungry by this time would be a tame expression of our needs. It was more than twenty four hours since I had broken fast, and now, rested and exhilarated by the enthusiasm engendered by the wilderness and beauty of our scenery. I waited only for a dinner to make me as good as new. Of that dinner partaken with each relish it would be unbecoming to speak -- if Apicius would have caviled at the mode, he could never have eaten with our delicious sauce of a good appetite. After dinner we walked, bathed and dressed with a whimsical reference to the day -- sang, recited and told tales of adventure till the clear beautiful light faded into the gentle tints of twilight.

In the morning we resumed our line of march. In leaving our pretty camp I felt an indescribable sadness. I could not bare to leave even a bit of bark astray. A strip of hemlock which hung dilapidated from the roof, I adjusted with care, and was most anxious that our lodge in the wilderness should be left in seemly wise. I felt even a homesick tenderness in turning away for I should see the spot no more in this world, and an unconscious attachment had endeared this place of resting to me. Others would come and go, and find shelter and repose there, but I never more. There was something in the place to touch the fancy. It was a sloping camp built of logs, pealed, so separated that reptiles would not harbor in it. Across the front ran what lumbermen whimsically call a "deacon's seat," and when the whole was covered with hemlock bark, and the interior spread with green boughs, it looked a gem of neatness and comfort. I found on our route back as we reached the various places where we had encamped on our way to the mountain, I hailed them with delight. They were endeared to me -- pleasant associations clustered about them, and I left them with a feeling of more pain than I was willing to confess.

We reached Hunt's after "camping out" eight nights and having walked more than fifty miles -- yet in good health and unabated spirits -- indeed we made our last toilet in the Wisatticook with great care and crowned our heads with green chaplets, so that when our bateau

grated upon the sand we were hailed by the Hunt family with delighted surprise at our spirited appearance. Here an excellent table tempted our wild wood appetites, and tidy beds invited to repose; but, we could scarcely sleep with doors and windows wide open. I thought I should suffocate – and would have made any sacrifice to be restored to our open camp and hemlock boughs.

A PILGRIM.