



Picturesque America; or, the land we live in

a delineation by pen and pencil of the mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, water-falls, shores, cañons, valleys, cities, and other picturesque features of our country ; with illustrations on steel and wood, by eminent American artists

Bryant, William Cullen

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Lake Memphremagog.

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LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY J. DOUGLAS WOODWARD.



Owl's Head Landing.

THE journey northward may be made in thirty-six hours, or it may be extended through several weeks. The route from the metropolis divides the Connecticut Valley, that fair reach of glistening stream and forest dell leading beyond into mountain mysteries. Nature wears her bridal robes, softly colored, fragrant, and bright—

"First a lake,
Tinted with sunset; next, the wavy lines
Of the far-reaching hills; and yet more far,
Monadnock lifting from his night of pines
His rosy forehead to the evening star."

You may start out from your city home for Memphremagog direct; but, in such a path-way as leads through the valley, you will linger, inhaling the breath of the daisy-scented fields, resting the wearied mind with the tranquil sentiment of the Arcadian life that dreams in the brook-side villages on your way. Grander scenes there may be, but they oppress and tire us, and we come back to the Connecticut Valley year after year, loving it the more, and deriving from it the solace that empowers us for renewed toil at the treadmill of city life. Loitering in these pastures a while, we arrive at the foot of Lake Memphremagog in a fit state of mind to appreciate its beauties, not so drowsy and fagged-out as we should be had our journey been unbroken. We disembark at the little Vermont town of Newport; submit ourselves to the regimen of a fashionable hotel; sleep well, and dream of peace. The morning breaks on a bracing day in the season of Nature's most gorgeous transformation; the autumn foliage is crowned with the richest hues; our fellow-tourists have less of the jaded expression that is almost habitual on their features, and so all circumstances are propitious for our voyage over the lake.

Some people tell us that it rivals Lake George, but this admits of difference of opinion; yet it is almost impossible that there should be any thing more picturesque, in the exact sense of that word, than this beautiful expanse with the awkward name. It is overshadowed by mountains and bordered by dense forests and grassy reaches. At one point it is in Lower Canada, and at another in Northern Vermont. It is thirty miles long and two miles wide; the basin that holds it is deep and narrow; numerous islands spring from its depths, where speckled trout, of enormous size, dart and glimmer. These things are imparted to us by an old resident, a freckled, long-faced, discursive down-easter, as our white steamer leaves her wharf near the hotel and speeds toward the other end of the lake. There is one object already in sight that we have been instructed not to miss—the Owl's Head, a mountain surpassing others around the lake in form and size. But it is yet twelve miles distant, and in the mean time our eyes and binocular glasses are attracted by many other enchantments that the shore sets forth.

Here is a narrow cape jutting out, the shimmering ripples tossing in play around; and yonder the land inclines into two bays, one of them sheltering the boats of some lazy boys, who are stretched on the thwarts, with their vagabond faces raised to the unclouded sun. The shore varies in character: for a mile it is high and craggy, and then the banks are low and rolling, girt by a belt of yellow sand. The deep water readily imprints the colors on its smooth surface, and duplicates the forms of earth and sky. Past Indian Point there is a small village, and farther on are the Twin Sisters, two fair



LAKE MEMPHREMACOG, SOUTH FROM OWL'S HEAD.

islands, thickly wooded with a growth of evergreens. Beyond we see another village, and soon we are abreast of Province Island, a cultivated garden of one hundred acres. Nearer the eastern shore is Tea-Table Island, a charming little spot with many cedar-groves, whence cometh the pleasant laughter of a picnic-party, whose fancifully-painted rowboats are moored to a little jetty.

Now we bid farewell to our native heath, and enter British waters, with British soil to the right and to the left of us. There are many farm-houses on the banks, white-painted, and dazzling in the sunlight. It is a national duty for those of us who are free-born Americans to observe that the houses in the Canadian territory are slovenly and uncared for, without the evidences of prosperity and thrift that appear in those situated on our own soil. But let us confess that the scenery of the lake does not diminish in beauty. There are no marsh-lands near its shore, and no stagnant pools. The banks are invariably picturesque, almost invariably fertile and under cultivation. Here is Whetstone Island, so named by some enterprising Yankees, who used the stone found in the neighborhood for axe-grinding, until her majesty's government decided that they were trespassers, and drove them away. A little farther in our course lies Magoon's Point, a grassy slope coming to the water's edge; and yonder is a cavern with a legend. Perhaps you who have seen so many caverns with legends begin to regard all of them with suspicion; but this one and its legend are veritable. Some marauders have secreted somewhere in the innermost recesses of one of the rocks a treasure-chest of immense value, stolen from a Roman Catholic cathedral. There is no doubt about it. The freckled, long-faced down-easter has seen, with his own sharp eyes, two massive gold candlesticks that were found within a yard or two of the entrance!

We are fast nearing Owl's Head. The boat winds in and out between the cedar-robed islands, and the golden haze vanishes into the clear and breezy day. We do not land during the journey down the lake, but pass Owl's Head, with only a glimpse at its magnificent height. We also speed by Round Island, cap-like in shape; Minnow Island, the most famous fishing-place, where some anglers are now stationed underneath the leafy boughs; and Skinner's Island, once the haunt of an intrepid smuggler, who snapped his fingers in the face of custom-house officers, and whose audacity has been chronicled in many a rhymed story. North of Skinner's Cave is Long Island, covering an area of about a square mile, with a rugged shore. At one place the shore is almost perpendicular, and on the southern side there is an extraordinary granite boulder, balanced on a natural pedestal, named Balance Rock. Hereabout, too, are the villas of some wealthy Montreal merchants, enclosed in magnificent parks on the banks.

Owl's Head is the most prominent mountain, and is cone-shaped. But, in our passage to the head of the lake, we see other heights that do not fall far below it. Here is Mount Elefantus, now faintly resembling an elephant's back, afterward changing, as we proceed farther north, into a horseshoe form. The water deepens; soundings



LAKE MEMPHREMACOG, NORTH FROM OWL'S HEAD.

show three hundred feet near Gibraltar Point, where the rocks are sheer to the water's edge. The sun wanes toward the west, and the wind grows keener. Yonder is Mount Oxford, not unlike Owl's Head; and here is a landing, toward which our steamer's prow inclines. We are at the foot of the lake. This drowsy little town is Magog, and attracts few of us ashore. A crowd of gaping inhabitants are on the wharf to welcome us, and, as we turn down the lake again, they break into a feeble but well-meaning cheer. The night comes on, and we haul up and go to sleep in a comfortable hotel at the base of the mountains.

In the morning we ascend Owl's Head. The path-way from the hotel is in good condition, overarched by pines and cedars, bordered by pleasant fields. A chorus of birds swells through the thickets; a few brown squirrels flee before us as we advance. The air is filled with the fragrance of wild-flowers, mosses, and ferns. Occasionally, through the green curtain that shelters us from the mounting sun, we catch a glimpse of the untroubled, azure sky. On the way there is a shelving rock, under which we are sheltered during a passing shower; and, proceeding farther, we reach a mass of stone, plumed with ferns, and covered on the sides with a velvety moss. The summit reached, we have such a view as rewards our toil. Looking south, we see the lake from end to end, its islands and villages, the near rivers flashing in the sunlight. Looking north, the picture expands into other beauties; and, to the east and west, there are more lakes, plains, islands, and mountains. The summit itself is riven into four peaks, silent ravines intervening between them. Once a year a lodge of freemasons meets here, and, on the face of the "Mountain Mystery," are written some cabalistic signs of the order.



Mount Elephantus, from the Lake Steamer.