THE GREAT DISMAL SWAMP.

Its History, its Mystery, its Romantic Legends.

(Correspondence of the Cincinnati Commercial.)

The air, in a circuit of thirty miles, is filled with odorous vapor almost too oppressive for a respiration. The great Dismal Swamp is on fire! The flames are sweeping its border line for full ten miles from east to west, devouring its underwood and burning the roots of its giant cypresses and pines feet under the soil. The area of this wilderness is 300 square miles. Its track lies like that of an immense horrid serpent, commencing nine miles back of Norfolk, and so far from the bay coast, and reaching southward thirty miles into the borders of North Carolina. To all the inhabitants of Southern Virginia living around its skirt, borders the Dismal Swamp has a zone like that of a half-explored catacomb. Ask one of the unimaginative residents of the neighborhood, who has never heard of Tom Moore, about this huge, half-romantic, wilderness, and his description ends with the statement that it is an ugly place, of which he knows little and wishes he knew less, as he has on some occasion mired in it waist deep, duck-shooting in its margin. Long ago, in the earliest history of the country, an adventurous hunter pressed through to the centre of this wilderness, and discovered a vast sheet of water lying within its mysterious depths. The water took the hunter's name, since when Lake Drummond has become known to geographical and other fame. In 1804, the Irish Tom Moore—the diminutive, poetic, "darling and kiss me Tom," of the ladies—visited Norfolk, and heard there the traditional stories of a young man who, on the death of his girl, he loved, lost his reason. In the lover's raving, he often said she was not dead, but gone to the Dismal Swamp. He suddenly disappeared, and his friends never afterward heard of him, and it was surmised that he had wandered into these gloomy morasses and perished. Moore wrote upon the incident of the story his graceful, melancholy ballad, commencing:

"They made her a grave too cold and damp
For a soul so warm and true,
And she's gone to the lake of the Dismal Swamp,
Where all night long, by her fire-fly lamp,
She paddles her white canoe.

"And her fire-fly lamp I soon shall see,
And her paddle I soon shall hear.
Long and lonely thy vigil for me shall be,
And I'll hide the maid in a cypress tree
When the footsteps of Death are near."

and made the fame of the spot as lasting as his own. There is no more significant manner of the power of genius to bestow immortality upon whatever it touches than this. Had it not been for Moore's ballad the Dismal Swamp would never have been known, save around its locality, as a first-class quagmire, hindering passage-way and declaiming sore feet. It is as familiar to Italy, with the mysterious, romantic interest of Moore's poem, to the world reading public as Dante's Inferno, or the shadows of the Brocken. What there is of the Dismal Swamp to the physical eye, is a vast sedge-grass forest, of cypress, juniper, oak, gum and pine trees, its gloomy recesses filled with pools and swamps overgrown with reeds and shrubbery and tangled wild vine. To Virginia the swamp has a historical memory clinging to it, as zombie as its cypress and mosses. It was the hiding place of the Nat. Turner insurrectionists, after their first stroke for liberty. For six weeks, to the whole South seemed that in their rising, they had made a nature the avenging genius of slavery crouched but for a moment before covering the land with desolation. Turner and his followers were but a dozen negroes. The slave population feared the menace of danger to the conscious dearth of its crime. Nat. Turner was caught in the Dismal Swamp starved, at last, and was taken and hung, as a monster black fiend, and history has passed him as the author of disorder. Had his rebellion had been successful, as it deserved, failing by no fault of his, to fix his name upon a race, its monument to-day would not be unblushed as Washington's. To-day the Dismal Swamp is a place of terror to the people of the south, and the Portsmouth and Roanoke Railway crosses the swamp, a few miles below Suffolk, and so far from the bay coast, and reaching southward thirty miles into the borders of North Carolina. To all the inhabitants of Southern Virginia living around its skirt, borders the Dismal Swamp has a zone like that of a half-explored catacomb. Ask one of the unimaginative residents of the neighborhood, who has never heard of Tom Moore, about this huge, half-romantic, wilderness, and his description ends with the statement that it is an ugly place, of which he knows little and wishes he knew less, as he has on some occasion mired in it waist deep, duck-shooting in its margin. Long ago, in the earliest history of the country, an adventurous hunter pressed through to the centre of this wilderness, and discovered a vast sheet of water lying within its mysterious depths. The water took the hunter's name, since when Lake Drummond has become known to geographical and other fame. In 1804, the Irish Tom Moore—the diminutive, poetic, "darling and kiss me Tom," of the ladies—visited Norfolk, and heard there the traditional stories of a young man who, on the death of his girl he loved, lost his reason. In the lover's ravings, he often said she was not dead, but gone to the Dismal Swamp. He suddenly disappeared, and his friends never afterward heard of him, and it was surmised that he had wandered into these gloomy morasses and perished. Moore wrote upon the incident of the story his graceful, melancholy ballad, commencing:

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