

ARTICLE.

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SUBJECT.

Typical Mountain Family, A.,

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Physical Anthropology, A.

*Gen. O. Howard
U. S. Army, Retired*

A Typical Mountain Family.

Having for some time been what they call a "Managing Director" of a group of schools in East Tennessee just across the Kentucky border where hills and mountains are thrown together with little apparent regularity or system, and where the people of the valleys get their living precariously, by small farming and not much better by mining Hematite-ore and its accompaniments, it struck me one day that I ought to reconnoitre and know my environment after the old army fashion, just as we used to do when we came into a new camp after a day's march. Abraham Lincoln's express wish for the Mountain people proper pressed my heart when he said: "Could you not pass that Gap and deliver them?" Surely knowledge is the true deliverance.

Col. H. H. Adams, now a New York merchant but formerly a young soldier in an Ohio regiment, Col. Robert Patterson, who won the name of a great captain in the Confederate service and is still called Captain, Mr. Kitchner another Confederate, Mr. Millard F. Overton, a worthy citizen of Cumberland Gap, Cyrus Kehr, Esq., a citizen of Chicago and myself made up a party of six who agreed to push out into the mountain fastnesses and see what we could discover. We took for our guide Robert Denny, whose father lived about fifteen miles off in a northerly direction far beyond what was called "the Pinnacle Mountain," which still bears the marks of war

and has a war history of its own. It is said that the Mountaineers of Switzerland, the Scotch highlanders, and the people of the New England ranges are all known as energetic, liberty-loving, patriotic people. From our observation the inhabitants of the Cumberland ranges in West Virginia, Virginia proper, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia have the same characteristics. But I had only observed them as they came down to trade in the little villages or a few of them now and then sought out our "Lincoln Memorial" schools to inquire about our school privileges, particularly about our industries as to whether a boy or a girl could get his living, pay his tuition, and buy his books by means of his own labor. Still we had seen but a very few real specimens of our mountaineers.

We, northern men, greatly desired to see them in their own rough houses and in the forests which some of them, we were told, were trying to conquer. It took us some time to get together six horses and equip them suitably for our purpose. Every man of the party at last had a respectable saddle and bridle and a fair mount. Robert Denny, who proved a capital guide, took the lead and I kept habitually, as was my custom in war, as near the guide as possible. I always could get a book of information from a good guide, or soon test the qualities, or rather the lack of them, of a poor one.

Robert was about the voting age, a young man of fine proportions, in perfect health, and though his book knowledge was still limited, owing to his commencing his training with us at the very foundation late in life, still he had learned every thing that mountains with all their roughness and untameable dispositions

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could teach him. He knew the springs, the trails, the so-called roads, the steeps, the precipices, the open glades, and every sort of animal whether bird or beast which flew above him or scampered off at his approach as he passed through fifteen miles of wildness on his way from his eyrie home to the village of Cumberland Gap.

As we began to wind our way up the stony Middleboro-wagon road, we first ran across a poorish straggling village. A. A. Myers, the old missionary and presiding genius who loves all the roughness of that strange region and who sometimes fancies that he owns thousands of acres of stony roads and palasade-like rocks, which stretch along for miles and overlook the Lincoln Harrow School property, had previously entertained me two or three times all along this route in a visit to the lofty summit. He then spoke to every passer-by - to every man, woman and child sitting in a doorway by a rough-board shanty, "How do you do, brother Henry ? or "How is sister Macomber to-day ?" Even the children would catch his salutation and reply "How-dy, Mr. Myers." Men he had fought hard in the courts, or pursued by the sheriff always in some sort of tone promptly answered his "good day!"

Mr. Myers had explained to me about the whisky mills, and how distilleries on the steep-hill-side had been dealt with. In one place a man had been killed. In another, one or more had been wounded. Here in a triangular corner criminals could play off against one or the other of the three states, Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee; as the Tennessee sheriff must confine his catchings to Tennessee, - or the Kentucky official his seizures to Kentucky.

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It was difficult to adjust and harmonize the three jurisdictions. Robert Denny, our guide, and the citizens of the country with us, made these things plain; but the feuds and crimes seemed from his stories to belong mainly to a past history. The little village below, so picturesque as we gazed upon it, snuggled away in a hollow among the steeps, like birds in a nest, was now "safe against whisky and "the stills", because of a favorable Tennessee law which protected the settlement so long as it was neither "an organized corporation" nor a "charter-made village;" all this deliverance obtained for a goodly distance beyond its environs in Tennessee; and the other states of Virginia and Kentucky were just then co-operating through their officials in favor of good government which the people round-about really loved. Right beneath our feet was a great spring of living water that flowed abundantly and supplied all the inhabitants of the settlement in sight. Furthermore, the stories concerning a wonderful cave which had a narrow entrance, and, below, an almost endless region of ledges and lakes, Robert detailed interestingly. It was not, however, like Buler's^w pictures of "the coming age". No animal life, or automotum, or electric moons were to be found there !!

We saw one girl of perhaps 15 years, who the night before had been finely dressed in white and contended successfully for the prize promised by the Women's Temperance Union. She did not look so nice to-day as when on the speaking-stage: but rough clothing and bared feet did not prevent us from remarking her natural grace and beauty. As with her so with many another of those dear

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children along the mountain road. They had bright eyes, healthy looks and smiling faces.

After moving by file up the smoother pathway by the road side in curves and zigzags, we suddenly came to a clear space at the lowest point of the crest of the first range. As I would have expected, here was a well contrived redoubt still in a very good state of preservation. There was enough of earth to cover the stony slopes and finish them with good sodding. The closest observation made it difficult to determine whether the Union soldiers had constructed this fort against all approaches from Tennessee, or whether the Confederates had not done it against all movements of Government troops from the North. Col. Patterson cleared up our doubts by showing that that work in the Gap was one of a series first constructed to prevent the troops of Buell or Thomas from having a too easy passage of the mountain ranges into Tennessee.

When Mr. Lincoln at Washington had stopped me at the White House on my way West with an army corps and inquired so seriously "if I did not think that we could cross over that Gap and seize Knoxville so as to deliver the Union people of that region", already there had been considerable battling and some strategic manoeuvring of Army divisions in that quarter. For example: the Union General Morgan had seized the crest of the Gap, rebuilt the redoubts and entrenchments, manning them well, with plenty of troops encamped behind his lines. While our Morgan was doing this, the Confederate Gen. Morgan with cavalry and with guides favorable to the Confederate cause, had managed to work around, by rugged ~~paths~~

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paths further to the South, and was getting upon the right rear of the Union men when some Unionists of the Mountains told the Union General what was on foot. Out Morgan at once spiked some of his cannon, hurried his extra ammunition, burnt up the supplies he could not carry and retired by hasty marching beyond the sphere of danger. Then his works thus abandoned were taken by the Confederates and reversed ready for some subsequent manoeuvre. Indeed, Burnside saved himself all trouble by passing the Mountains further south under the leadership of our Tennessee soldiers. Thus my reader will perceive that as we stood there representing both armies we easily took in the situation and had pictures of actual war before us to be followed by the magnificent fruits of peace so evident to our eyes as we took in the villages and cultivated country lying like a panorama open to our view. How glad we were of the "Grant-Lee Hall" over there almost in sight by the Harrow Station which united the great contending Generals in that sort of practical education that was to lift up Union men and Confederates, and make them valuable citizens with a common glory and a common destiny.

We saw one or two families living in rough shanties, hardly fit to be called houses; how the people in them obtained their subsistence was not easy to determine. Some of the older children had before this found their way to our "Lincoln Memorial" Schools. Their faces brightened as they ran out to see their friends in the cavalcade passing by. We now entered the forest again along a narrow wagon-road that had so many stones in it and so many ruts

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down the slopes that we wondered that anybody should ever drive a carriage over it.

At the end of seven miles of our journey, still in the forest, we found a broad dooryard, and a house of better build than any we had seen. It had but one story and was constructed mostly of hewn logs, knotty boards, and axe-trimmed timber for joists. There appeared to be four or five rooms. Here we found what I would call a Mountain prince, a characteristic Kentuckian, much after the description of Abraham Lincoln's father. It was a broad shouldered, thick set man, David Rawlson by name, if my memory serves me right; his hair and beard had not been trimmed for sometime and he understood the use of tobacco; without coat or jacket or hat he came out to meet us as we gathered in front of his domicile. He asked us to dismount and brought us within his abode. At first he thought we were reconnoitering the country in search of timber or timber-land. On entering, besides the owner, we saw two or three women. Their beds were made, for there were broad ones in every room, and on the whole there was an air of tidiness about them that one would not have expected from the apparent ruggedness of our host and the outside. As soon as he found that we were to turn off on a trail which led up into a higher region he offered to mount one of his young horses and go with us but as soon as he noticed the presence of Robert Denny "he reckoned that he had better not go, "you will not need me, and my mare has lost a shoe." Soon other men, in some way connected with him, gathered in from his cultivated fields, none of which were in sight. This household had the usual mountain hospitality; they offered us everything they had, good water

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to drink for ourselves and our horses, and a dinner, if we would only stop long enough to have it cooked. This place appeared to be isolated; there was no habitation nearer than six or seven miles in any direction. It was indeed a home in the forest. Around it were evidences of abundance. Every male had his horse; our host had several - two or three close at hand. There were dogs for defense; there was poultry of different kinds contentedly wandering in the neighboring woods or around the premises, but except where the women had put things to rights within doors there was no evidence of order or system. Plenty, indeed, for comfort but no skill or knowledge sufficient to compass it.

We turned to the left and passed through a wooded valley, and for a while following the course of a mountain stream our pathway was smooth; but soon we began to ascend steep after steep. I was still following Robert Denny when on a sudden ascent he turned and said to me : "General Howard, you had better dismount and lead your horse!" except Robert and Col. Adams, who in his youth had ridden fast horses in battle, the others had already dismounted and were laboring along the trail with evident difficulty. The trail led along a ^arevine steep below us and steep above us, so that a single mistep of the horse might cast horse and rider hundreds of feet to the bottom of the canyon. As I did not dismount Robert said again: "Oh, General, it is too dangerous for you with your one hand !" I remember the Nez Perché trails of the Salmon River and the Rocky Mountains which had given me plenty of hair-breadth experience. My horse was a good one so I laughingly replied: "Robert,

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I am used to Mountain trails." I gave my intelligent horse the full rein, laid my cheek against his neck and held firmly by the mane, and Robert had hard work to keep out of our way while Col. Adams and myself skirted the precipice and reached the less dangerous portions of the trail. Five miles of this narrow, flinty or ledgy pathway through a forest without previous openings brought us to a field near the top of the mountain. It was a singular field that our eyes fell upon. Large trees studded it not twenty feet apart; boulders large and small were left to roughen the surface; we caught glimpses of log fencing here and there, and then we saw first some small log structures, which proved to be - one of them - a general tool deposit, another a stable, with no loft, large enough to hold a horse, saddle and bridles, and another structure perhaps for a sheep cote and a poultry house. Above them all, up the slope of the field, was the house. When we came near it we found that it was built of logs, smoothed a little on the interior; that it had three rooms finished about as well as one would expect with the axe and the saw; all the beams exposed; the roof was covered with "shaikes" - sort of split shingles; the fireplace was large and the mantle high and the chimney outside. To this house was added a commodious porch as roughly constructed as the rest. I saw but two doors, one of entrance and one of issue, one at the front and the other at the rear. I noticed the rifle and the shot gun in their places over the mantle; I noticed the broad beds in each of the rooms, and Robert told me that the porch was their room for breakfast, dinner and supper. In one room I saw the loom of sixty years ago, the quilling wheel, and a very well preserved spinning wheel.

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I saw by the back door piles of wool sheared from the mountain sheep and already washed and ready for spinning and weaving. This house had been well occupied, there had been thriteen children and Mr. and Mrs. Denny. Robert had reason to be proud of his family. Scarcely any of them could read and write, some did not even know their letters. Robert was the only one that could read intelligently their only book - the large Bible. There were no newspapers or magazines in sight. It was a singular family; they were veritable Scotch-highlanders. Mr. Denny was a manly, self-respecting man, and Mrs. Denny, apparently about forty-five, was a womanly woman. Their children ranged from Robert, twenty-one or two - perhaps twenty-five - to a little girl of some six or seven years. Two children had married and settled in the neighborhood, that is, more than a mile away among the mountain peaks and in the forest. The boys were good looking, and I thought a little jealous of Robert, but frank and fearless, of course a little wild withal in their appearance. The girls, without exception from the eldest a woman grown to the youngest very reticent and bashful. Mr. Denny did most of the talking with us but I took pains to draw out the others as well as I could. They prepared us a dinner, ^{we} with as much delicacy as possible contributing our lunch that we had brought in saddle bags. Everything they furnished, the meat, the coffee and the bread was well cooked and we were waited upon by the entire family as if we had been princes. When we left Mr. Denny said to me: "I took this ground up here three hundred acres - because land was cheap and I wanted to take care of my family." He added with some feeling,

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"I would like to give my boys and girls a chance. If I can rent my place I will come down to Cumberland Gap and send all the children that are home to your ^{school} ~~"Lincoln Memorial"~~. Every time that I think of this family, which I take to be a type of the better portion of the mountain people, I feel as though that Mr. and Mrs. Denny had as much native talent as my own father and mother, but oh, what a difference in point of privilege!

At the next Commencement Mr. Denny, though not able to rent his place, had partly kept his promise. He came to the Gap and arranged that some of his children should go to the School. In this our excellent guide had given his help. Since then some of them have continued to enjoy the privileges of our grand institution. If they ^{had known} ~~but knew~~ it they could all have come and worked part of the time on ^{the} ~~our~~ farm land or in the shops, and part of the time giving themselves to study, for we put the plane of education beneath their necessities and give them the opportunity even as Andrew Johnson had it after thirty, though they may be twenty years of age or upwards.

On our return journey, as we sat together upon our horses near the crest of the highest mountain, and took in the whole country for fifty miles north, south and east, you can hardly conceive of our exaltation as we sang the praises of God and saw in the future a great institution, the "Lincoln Memorial" rising up which should be the dispenser of blessings of the most practical kind to these dear people such as we had seen, who dwell in the Mountains and the valleys of Eastern Tennessee.

O. O. Howard
Major-Genl U. S. Army
(Retired)

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these dear people such as we had seen, who dwell in the mountains
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John D. Denny
Mountain Memorial
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