

CHAPTER XVI

THE MILWAUKEE RIVER

Because it was the biggest source of happiness in my childhood days, I am going to tell you about the Milwaukee River. It ran, by a winding route, diagonally through the farm. I still think it is very beautiful although much of the forest has been cut away from its banks. In one place the winding of the river has left a very long and twisted peninsula which we called the "Ox bow" from a fancied resemblance to the "bow" with which oxen were pitched together. This was a very beautiful tract. It was heavily wooded and abounded in flowers, red raspberries, black berries and elderberries.

I knew the habitat of every flower and there certainly was an abundance of them. I did not know the botanical names, but fortunately that is not necessary to the enjoyment of them. There was one especial place where hepatica grew larger, more luxuriantly and in more shades than I have ever seen it in any other place. I did not call it hepatica, I called it Mayflower.

I did not enjoy fishing, as Grandfather has told you he did. My, no! I abhorred it. I only recall once that Grandpa tried to have me fish with him. I would not put the angleworm on the hook or even look at him when he did it. It filled me with horror and disgust, as did also the splashing of the fish in a pail of water after he took them off the hook. I expect he thought me very silly. I never ate any of the fish. Years after I left the farm, I became very fond of all kinds of sea food. Also, much later, I enjoyed many pleasant fishing excursions.

But what happy, happy hours I spent wading in the shallow places of that river and what treasures I found! It was a great disappointment when I found the beautiful pebbles I took home were not so bright and shining when they were dry, until I discovered that I could put them in bottles and keep water on them. Clam shells were most alluring with their pink, blue and ivory tinted linings. It was a red letter day when I found that I could hold the clam shell on Grandpa's grindstone, take off the black outer covering and have only the "ivory" left. With these and various kinds of shells I made shell boxes and thought them real works of art.

I had collections of all sorts of woody things found down by the river, including moss and fungus of various kinds. When Aunt Jennie came to visit us, these collections had a way of disappearing, for she hated to see a house cluttered up. I did not mind very much, for when she was gone, I could always make another collection.

The river was so winding that to follow the bank along its course through the farm was an afternoon jaunt. Toward the southeast border of the farm, the river bounded the big marsh on one side. To walk along here one had often to step on fallen tree trunks or, sometimes, wade. On the farther side of the meadow were some bluffs that I have always considered were very high. In later years my faith has been somewhat shaken in them. When I passed over the farm in an airplane in 1929 and again in 1930, I could not find them.

The side of these bluffs sloping down to the river were at that time heavily wooded and very beautiful. It was the grandest place to

imagine Indians, fairies and elves. I always felt very far from home and as if I had taken a very fine and romantic trip when I got there, although by going a little way up in a clearing on the bluff, I could easily have seen our farm buildings. This part of the farm was always referred to as Canada - I don't know why.