Keeping a Trail Journal

John M. Gould, 1877

Selected pages from How to Camp Out.

A walker?s method for recording the day?s route and observations in a pocket diary, with a sample entry.

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CHAPTER XI.

DIARY.

By all means keep a diary: the act of writing will help you to remember these good times, and the diary will prove the pleasantest of reading in after-years. It is not an easy thing to write in camp or on the march, but if it costs you an effort you will prize it all the more. I beg you to persevere, and, if you fail, to "try, try again." I cannot overcome the desire to tell you the results of my experience in diary-writing; for I have tried it long, and under many different circumstances. They are as follows:—

First, any thing written at the time is far better than no record at all; so, if you can only write a pocket diary with lead pencil, do that.

Second, All such small diaries, scraps, letters, and every thing written illegibly or with lead pencil, are difficult to preserve or to read, and are very unhandy for reference.

Third, It is great folly to persuade yourself that after taking notes for a week or two, or

writing a hurried sketch, you can extend or copy and illuminate at your leisure.

Consequently, write what you can, and let it stand with all its blots, errors, and nonsense. And be careful, when you are five years older, not to go through the diary with eraser and scissors; for, if you live still another five years, nothing will interest you more than this diary with all its defects.

I find after having written many diaries of many forms, that I have now to regret I did not at first choose some particular size, say "letter-size," and so have had all my diaries uniform. I will never again use "onion-skin," which is too thin, nor any odd-shaped, figured, cheap, or colored paper. I do not like those large printed diaries which give you just a page or half-page a day, nor a paper whose ruling shows conspicuously.

I like best when at home to write in a blank book; and when I go off on a summer vacation I leave that diary safely at home, and take a portfolio with some sheets of blank paper upon which to write the diary, and mail them as fast as written. These answer for letters to the friends at home, and save writing any more to them. They also, when bound, form a diary exclusively of travels. When I return I write an epitome in the home-diary, and thus prevent a

break of dates in that book. The paper for the diary of travels is strong, but rather thin and white. I buy enough of it at once to make a volume, and thus have the diary sheets uniform.

I am quite sure that you will do well to write a diary of your summer vacation, upon the plan just named, whether you keep one at home or not. Try to do it well, but do not undertake too much. Write facts such as what you saw, heard, did, and failed to do; but do not try to write poetry or fine writing of any kind. Mention what kind of weather; but do not attempt a meteorological record unless you have a special liking for that science. If you camp in Jacob Sawyer's pasture, and he gives you a quart of milk, say so, instead of "a good old man showed us a favor;" for in after-years the memory of it will be sweeter than the milk was, and it will puzzle you to recall the "good old man's" name and what the favor was. If you have time, try to draw: never mind if it is a poor picture. I have some of the strangest-looking portraits and most surprising perspectives in my diaries written when fifteen to twenty years old; but I would not exchange them now for one of the "old masters." Do not neglect the narrative, however, for sake of drawing.

I have noticed that when my paper is down in the bottom of a valise, and the pen in a wallet,

and the penholder in a coat-pocket, and portfolio somewhere else, it is not so easy to "find time to write" as when I have penholder, pen, and paper in the portfolio, and the portfolio and ink in my haversack. Under these favorable conditions it is easy to snatch a few moments from any halt; and a diary written on the spur of the moment is a diary that will be worth reading in after-life. If it is impossible, however, as it so often is, to write oftener than once a day, you will do well to make a note of events as fast as they happen, so that you shall not forget them, nor have to stop to recall them when your time is precious.

I have heard of diaries with side-notes on each page, and even an index at the end of the book; but not many men, and but few boys, can do all this; and my advice to the average boy is, not to undertake it, nor any thing else that will use the time, patience, and perseverance, needed to write the narrative.

You will find it convenient for reference if you make a paragraph of every subject. Date every day distinctly, with a much bolder handwriting than the body of the diary; and write the date on the right margin of the right page, and left margin of the left page, with the year at the top of the page only. Skip a line or two instead of ruling between the days. Thus:—

1876.

JANUARY 1, SATURDAY.

Pleasant and mild.

Vacation ends to-day.

Jo. Harding is full of going on a walk to the White Mountains next summer, and he wants me to go too.

Made New-Year calls on Susie Smith, Mary Lyman, Ellen Jenkins, Christie Jameson, and Martha Buzzell.

JANUARY 2, SUNDAY.

Warm again and misty.

Went to church. Mr. Simpson's pup followed him in; and it took Simpson, Jenks the sexton, and two small boys, to put him out.

Accompanied Susie Smith to the Baptist's this evening, and went home by way of Centre Street to avoid the crowd. Crowds are not so bad sometimes.

JANUARY 3, MONDAY.

Still mild and pleasant, but cooler.

Went to school, and failed in algebra. This X *business is too much for me.*

Abel's shoe-factory, next to our schoolhouse, caught fire this afternoon while we were at recess, and Mr. Nason dismissed the school. We all hurrahed for Nason, and went to the fire. Steamer No. 1 *put it out in less than ten minutes after she got there.*

Home all the evening, studying.

If you are like me, you will be glad by and by if you note in your diary of the summer vacation a few dry statistics, such as distances walked, names of people you meet, steamers you take passage on, and, in general, every thing that interested you at the time, even to the songs you sing; for usually some few songs run in your

head all through the tour, and it is pleasant to recall them in after-years.

Do not write so near the margins of the paper that the binder will cut off the writing when he comes to trim them.