

All about it the ground sloped away, but in the far background the sunset fires still burned over a purple range of hills, the ground white with snow, the tree standing gaunt in the cold twilight, and yet sharp cut against the red in the west. To this picture anyone's attention might be drawn.

The Doctor gazed at it as if he would engrave its every detail on his brain. At last he shook himself, almost a sigh escaped him and he settled down in his chair once more.

"A man that likes pictures like that is worth knowing. It's odd, but I used to know a tree just like that, in the same situation, too, and the course of my whole life depended upon that tree. Queer that an animate being should so depend on an inanimate. But I'm going to bother you, I know, with an idle story, interesting only to myself."

"By no means, Doctor. I could not wish to spend my time more pleasantly."

Not for worlds would he have broken off the other.

"To know my true feelings about that picture, and that tree, we'll have to go back into the past. Use that imagination which I praised, for my words are inadequate, sadly so."

For a while the man was silent, his gaze centering itself again in the fire as it leaped and curled about a fresh log. Then he spoke thoughtfully, ruminatingly.

"If you can picture to yourself a hill country, not mountains but great bold hills, heaped up and sinking into valleys. No fertile land this, but rocky, with a soil grudging the barest crops. It was a new land. The wilderness still kept its outposts on the farther hills, and the pastures, the stubble fields were set out in a checkering of woodlots. To live one had to work, and the boys and girls grew prematurely old with the grinding toil. Some drifted to the cities, but usually they came back. The love of the out doors brought them from an aimless life in the city. Born and bred in the open, in the empty spaces of the hills and sky, in a land of purple twilights, of flaming sunsets, of white winters,