WITH regard to life in the very early days of this country, we are under many misconceptions, one of our most distorted views being of the pioneer and the forest. Always one sees emphasized the fact that the pioneer regarded the forest as his worst enemy. Seemingly he hated it. In particular he hated its eternal gloom. In journal after journal of early travelers one sees this set forth most strikingly. And no one can wonder at it. The mind of man is not by nature attuned to eternal gloom.

But that this feeling of dislike extended to the entire forest seems anything but likely; for, if anyone could appreciate and

*All his life Dr. Lewis E. Theiss, Professor Emeritus of Journalism at Bucknell University, has spent whatever time he could spare in the forests of Pennsylvania. Two of his many books deal with forestry: Lumberjack Bob and The Wireless Operator as a Fire Patrol. "My many experiences in the forest," he writes, "my trips down the river, in canoes, on lografts and on foot, all seem to have centered attention on Pennsylvania pioneering days."
value the gifts of the forest, it should have been the man who
profited by them. For his whole life was dependent upon the
largess of the woodlands. So it is appropriate that we ask our-
selves, "Just what did the forest contribute to the pioneer?" The
answer is, "Everything."

As that is a term so broad that it has little meaning, let us ex-
amine these gifts in detail. First of all, the forest gave the Penn-
sylvania pioneer his home. Like any other home, this early habi-
tation demanded certain things: the site must be favorable, an
assured water supply must be at hand, ample fuel must be close
by, and food must be obtained almost at the doorstep. Penn's
Woods supplied every one of these necessities and many others
in addition.

With the home site chosen, the newcomer could within a day
or two fell enough suitable trees to make a log cabin. One of the
things that the forest produced without limit was mutual helpful-
ness on the part of its inhabitants. Let a newcomer arrive in a
neighborhood and the nearest inhabitants promptly came to him
to help him erect his home. Often they had to come from consid-
erable distances. Down came the trees on the selected site, speed-
ily they were cut to length, notched, and rolled up to form the
walls, shakes were made and the roof put on, logs were split length-
wise and the flat sides smoothed to make a floor. If stones were
available, a huge fireplace was fashioned. If not, the fireplace was
made of pieces of tree limbs. Then the interior of it was plastered
thick with clay. And so, within two or three days, the pioneer was
supplied with a home that was strong, defensible, fairly comfort-
able. It was really amazing. For countless migrants came into the
woods with almost nothing excepting their rifles and their axes.
Yet in no time at all they also possessed comfortable homes.

It was not so everywhere in America. Had the Pilgrims had log
cabins, it is almost certain that the death toll that first winter,
when half of them died, would have been nothing like as great.
But they had only shelters made of upright poles rounded together
at the top, and plastered outside with clay. In such a flimsy shelter
there was no place for a real fire. In the Pennsylvania log cabin,
on the other hand, every settler had a roaring blaze that provided
a lot of heat. It may be that, as has been said, the settler roasted
on one side and froze on the other, but that is only an exaggerated
way of speaking. Within a certain radius of his fireplace, the Penn-
sylvan frontsman certainly had heat and comfort. So here was his first great gift from the woods—his home.

His water supply has been mentioned. And what water it was! No chlorine was needed in Penn’s Woods, nor other noxious disinfectant. Everywhere were strong-flowing springs whose sparkling waters were the acme of purity. And even the small streams flowed clean and clear as crystal. So here was gift number two.

As for fuel for his fire, that was everywhere. And the beauty of the situation was that, when he labored to clear his land, he was killing two birds with one stone: he was preparing cultivable fields, and he was producing firewood. He was doing even more than that: some of the tree trunks that he felled he would split into rails for fences. Nor was even that the end of his bounty. For the ashes that accumulated where he burned excess timber in his clearings, had great value as fertilizer. And just as soon as it was possible to transport them, the ashes brought in sufficient cash to pay the cost of clearing. When the country reached the canal stage,
ashes formed a very considerable part of the cargoes hauled. Thus the woods, so to speak, paid the settler to chop them down and burn them.

With his home erected, his fields by way of coming into being, the settler was indeed on his way. But meantime he had to live. Where could he get his food? There were no stores within scores or even hundreds of miles. His tiny initial clearing could not possibly produce food enough to sustain a family. But was the settler beaten? Not he. He merely picked up his rifle, stepped out into the woods, and in no time came back home with a deer on his shoulder, or dragging a bear, or carrying a fat turkey, or hauling some other choice bit of provender.

For the supply of game to be found in Penn's Woods in the early days is past belief. If it were not for certain journals wherein early woodsmen recorded such things as their kills of game, we would have no idea of the immense numbers of game animals that swarmed in Penn's Woods. Fortunately, we do have such records. So let us turn to Pioneer Life, the story that Philip Tome wrote concerning the migration of his family to the woods of central Pennsylvania in 1791, and his account of his efforts as a professional hunter—for Tome never took to farming, like the rest of his family, but spent his years roaming the forest and killing game that he brought back and traded for things he could get in the settlements. The subtitle of his book is Thirty Years a Hunter. So Tome should have seen as much of the forest and its denizens as any man who ever penetrated it.

His family took up land some miles up Pine Creek, a magnificent stream that enters the Susquehanna just above Jersey Shore. For miles this creek flows through a deep gorge that has attained fame as the Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania. The countryside for miles in every direction is wild and romantic. Even today only a few small towns are to be found along its course.

Almost from the start of Philip Tome's life on Pine Creek, events seem to have worked together to make him the remarkable woodsman that he became. In 1799, when he was only seventeen years of age, a company of men was sent out by William Ellis, Samuel Wallis, and Henry Drinker of Philadelphia to survey the western land. They came up Pine Creek in a keel boat loaded with flour, pork, sugar, chocolate, tea, and so forth. When they arrived
at the Tome place, one of them became ill and wanted to go home. Mr. Tome offered to let his son, Philip, go with the surveyors.

Before the party proceeded, the elder Tome took Philip aside and gave him some instructions and advice. Among other things, he told him to watch for game, for salt licks, and other places where game might gather, and to note the nature of the country. He advised him what to do if he became lost, and so on. Young Philip was delighted at this opportunity, and followed his father's instructions to the letter. In all probability it was this youthful adventure that made him a professional hunter, for thirty years a wanderer in the forest.

In the days of Philip Tome, the Pine Creek valley was a favorite resort of the elk. Tome was early introduced to the practice of elk hunting. In August of 1795, when he was but thirteen years of age, he had gone with his father and two men to hunt for elk. They headed for a place called Stony Lick. Within two miles of the spot, they came upon the tracks of a buck and a doe elk. Half a mile farther on, the elk tracks showed that the two animals had suddenly taken great leaps and then dashed off on separate courses. The men followed the buck track and young Philip took after the doe, but he kept within sight of the party. Very soon he came upon fresh elk entrails, and called to the others. They came back and
soon found the dead doe. She had been disemboweled by a panther, her throat torn open and her blood sucked out. They skinned the animal, salted the meat, and stowed it away between two logs. Then they went on to Stony Lick, and camped there that night.

The next day they met the buck elk retracing its tracks, and shot it. They cut off its horns, which had a spread of nearly six feet, with eleven branches. The carcass weighed between five and six hundred pounds. They had a hard struggle to drag the animal out. They found the body of the doe had not been disturbed by the panther. So they had two great carcasses to take home. They of course had to get a horse to do it.

Tome spent many days trying to capture some of these huge animals alive and bring them out of the forest uninjured. He wrote that he could get a thousand dollars for a good live elk delivered in some sizable town. Tome did more than try to catch them. He did catch them. With several companions, some good dogs, a horse, and some strong ropes, he would travel up Pine Creek in search of his prey. Elk were very fond of eating the mosses that grew in the creek, and they also liked the tender fresh growths along the banks. Here and there were salt licks where the animals gathered in numbers. Tome tells of seeing sixty in the creek at one of their favorite feeding places. And it was not unusual to see thirty or forty gathered in some favorite area. In 1794, James King and a Mr. Manning went hunting up Pine Creek. At the second fork they saw forty elk drinking in the stream, with others as far as they could see. They estimated the herd at two hundred.

When an elk was discovered, dogs were sent after it. The elk bounded off until, wearied, it took refuge atop one of the huge boulders, which were numerous in the region. When the men came up, they fashioned a noose in a rope, and with a long pole or sapling got the rope about the elk’s antlers. They also tried to get a rope around one of the animal’s feet. Then they dragged the creature from the rock, having first made one of the ropes fast to a tree. It was not difficult then to get more ropes on the captured animal. Then the horse was attached to a rope at some distance ahead of the elk, to pull it ahead if it balked, and some of the men walked behind in order to snub the animal if it tried to dash ahead. Thus they walked the captured creature out
of the woods. During his years as a hunter, Tome captured several elk in this way.

What exterminated the elk herds was not the occasional capture of one alive, but the constant killing of the animals. One elk would provide several hundred pounds of meat. When Tome had shot one, he cleaned it, salted the meat heavily to preserve it, and left it for a time where it lay, until he had done some more hunting. As a professional hunter he often had with him a horse, a quantity of salt, provisions, and other hunting necessities, so that he could remain in the woods for many days. He hunted the forest from the Susquehanna to the Allegheny.

As there were no game laws in his day, and all settlers regarded the game as inexhaustible, just as settlers did the countless trees in the forest, hunters had no scruples of any sort about killing game. The thing that counted was to get the game. "The most successful mode of killing deer from the first of June to the last of September," wrote Tome, "was to fire-hunt them. Deer would come to the stream after dark to eat the moss which grew on the bottom, and collect together about the ripples, in groups of three to ten. The hunters would build a fire of yellow pitch pine in the middle of a canoe, stationing a man in the stern to steer, and one or two more in front to fire at the deer. The herd would raise their heads and stand looking at the fire until the canoe came within a few yards of them. The hunters could judge by their movements whether they would make a break or stand still. When a deer attempted to run out of the water where the bank was bluff and steep, the animal would see its own shadow, and thinking it
was a dog or a wolf would utter a cry and spring back into the water. In this manner the hunters would kill from one to four deer in one place. Having dressed and laid out the meat on the shore, they would proceed along the river in search of another group. If the night was favorable, from three to ten deer might be killed in this manner.

Tome, being a professional hunter, perhaps knew more about the animals of the forest than most settlers would know. Tome received his first instructions in hunting from an old hunter named John Mills, who offered to sell Tome his dog and tell him all he knew about hunting for the sum of fifteen dollars. Tome accepted the offer. "I followed the directions I had received," he wrote, "and with a success that showed their value. From the early part of October to the first of February I killed twenty-eight bears and a large number of deer."

One of the things that Tome learned was about the habits of the deer. He says that in June these animals frequent beech and maple woods, or feed in the marshes bordering the streams. About the last of July they take to the highlands, among the chestnuts and white oak woods, feeding on pea vines and other herbage. In the hot weather of August they lie in the thickest shade on high hills, and at this time the manner of hunting them is to watch by a spring as near the summit of the hill as may be found. They will come at evening to drink, and fall an easy prey to the hunter. By the last of September, the deer begin to leave the thickets and move from one place to another. For several months they are constantly in motion. When the first snows come they can be tracked to the places where herds of them lie at night, and the hunter can keep near a herd and pick them off with his rifle.

"In 1805," wrote Tome, "a colony of about forty families of English people made a settlement between the first and second forks of Pine Creek. [Could this be English Center?] They cleared about 250 acres of land and built several good houses. But being unaccustomed to the hardships and dangers of pioneer life, they abandoned the settlement after struggling along for five years. As soon as the coast was clear, the deer from all the country round came to feed in the cultivated fields and sunny pastures of the deserted settlement. This afforded a capital opportunity for hunters. We would lodge in the upper story of some deserted house, and
looking out of a window in the morning could see, perhaps, forty deer. I have often shot a couple of deer from the window before leaving the house in the morning.”

During Tome’s years as a hunter he shot several thousand deer. And Tome was only one of many professional hunters. Obviously the woods were full of deer. The settlers lived largely upon venison and bear meat. At the start, no settler had enough beef animals to permit of their slaughter for food. The forest supplied all the meat the pioneers needed.

As for bears, the settlers soon came to know their habits and killed them in two ways: by hunting them with dogs and rifles, and by bear traps or houses. The pioneers had good reason to wish to kill bears, for these creatures often raided the clearings and made off with little pigs. When either bears or wolves became too troublesome, the pioneers made little houses in which to trap them. These were made of logs, much as a log cabin was made, but the house was erected on the side of a hill, and was so placed that its flat, log roof was about level with the top of the hill. A considerable hole was fashioned in this roof, with a door held up in the hole by stiff springs. The bait was so placed that the wolf had to step on this door to get it. The door instantly dropped down, spilling the wolf into the little house. Then the door sprang up into place again. The house for bears was similar but larger. In such traps the settlers caught great numbers of wolves and bears.

They also knew where to look for the bears when out hunting. About the first of May, bears were to be found in the little streams in search of fish. About the last of July, when berries were ripe, bears could be found where berries were. They were very fond of whortleberries, which grew in vast patches in certain areas. If there were no whortleberries, the bears would eat blackberries. If neither was to be had, they fed on wild cherries. During the months of January and February, bears could be tracked to their dens. Tome says that one bear den would sometimes contain as many as five bears. He also says that bears are extremely ferocious at that time of year and the hunter needed to be prepared with plenty of dogs and guns. One writer says that in those early days, bear meat was as common in pioneer homes as pork chops are today on farms.

Fish were perhaps even more abundant. Every river and every
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brook fairly swarmed with fish in those early days in Penn's Woods. In the Susquehanna certain islands seemed to be exceptionally favorable to fishing, and on them notable fisheries were established. These islands narrowed the channel, forcing the fish to swim in great schools at those points. Hence they were easily caught in nets.

Such a fishery was an island near Selingsgrove owned by Jimmy Silverwood, who signed his name "James Silverwood, Master of Seven Islands." Another famous fishery was Lawson's Island, in the West Branch. This was an island of seven to ten acres in extent. It has now utterly disappeared. The Muncy Dam was built at the upper end of it. Here, it is recorded, some 2,500 shad were caught in one haul of a seine. And that was not an unusual thing. It is on record that, at a certain North Branch fishery, ten thousand fish were taken in one haul of a seine.

These great catches of fish were highly important to the settlers, for the fish were salted down in barrels and supplied a considerable part of the winter's food. Necessarily, these great catches were cooperative efforts. The settlers gathered on the river bank, with their empty barrels, their baskets of salt, their seines and boats all prepared. Rowing out from the shore in a footboat, the fishers paid out their seine as they moved in a great semicircle along the stream and then back to the shore. All hands took hold of the ends of the great net, and a mighty effort it was to tug it to the beach. Then, with hundreds and hundreds of the great shad flopping in the net, the settlers grasped them one by one, throwing back the roe shad and cleaning the buck shad, which they packed neatly in their barrels, with generous quantities of salt to preserve them. With such provision against deep snows and stormy winter weather when hunting was next to impossible, the settlers were assured of food.

Even as late as the middle of the last century river shad furnished many families with winter food supplies. An aged friend of mine, now long dead, told me that as late as the 1860's he got his winter fish supply by catching spring shad. By the time he mentioned, the canal had been in existence some thirty years. At the Muncy Dam, as in all other dams, there was a chute for the passage of rafts, small boats, etc. Shad ascending the river to spawn had to work their way up these chutes, in which the current
was very swift. Often they were swept back. For a time they would rest in the eddy at the foot of the chute. Here my friend would take his stand, with a dipnet. He told me that, in 1864, if I remember the date correctly, he filled a barrel with shad in four hours. On one occasion, he said, he dipped out eight shad at one sweep of his net.

Even in the smaller streams huge quantities of fish were taken by the early settlers. Half a mile above the Tome homestead was a dam across Pine Creek. One day in 1792 young Philip Tome was fishing near this dam, and he saw great numbers of trout try to jump over the dam. Two-thirds of them succeeded, but some jumped too soon and fell on the breast of the dam where Philip could pick them up. While he was watching the fish jump, he thought up a plan to catch an endless number of them. It was like a splashdam in reverse. He set up a board about two feet wide, to intercept the fish in their leaps. It worked. Before night he placed boards the entire length of the dam. Next morning he took a basket and went to gather up his catch. His father asked him
where he was going. Philip said he was going to catch some trout. When he came home very soon with a large basket filled with trout, his father was amazed. Philip explained. Thereafter, when the water was at a middle stage, as Tome expresses it, the Tomes followed this method and caught great quantities of fish.

They also followed the Indian method of building pointed dams in the stream, piling low stone walls outward from the shores and downward until the two walls nearly met. These walls forced the water to flow through the opening so formed—and with the water the fish. In the opening between the walls they built what we today call a fishbasket. This was a platform made of slats, with high sides. The fish were swept up on the slats and stranded there, the water dropping down between the slats. All the fishermen had to do was to pick up his catch. As Tome put it, "We were so abundantly supplied with fish from this source that we fed them to our hogs."

Probably Pine Creek had no more fish in it, relatively, than other small streams did. Yet the quantity of fish seems incredible. Tome tells about this. "About the fifth of October, in that season, there came a rise of water in Pine Creek. The succeeding night we caught about two barrels of eels, and three wagon loads of suckers. From this time we continued to take from twenty to thirty or forty eels besides a number of other fish nightly, until about November tenth, when there came another rise of water in the creek. In three hours we took three barrels of good salmon and rock-fish, with four wagon loads of suckers. At dark the eels began to run, when my father, assisted by three of us boys and a man, began to carry out the eels, but the other fish came in so rapidly as to dam up the water, so that the eels would go over the sides of the basket, and as they were difficult to catch, we threw out the fish to make room for the eels. Finding that we were still losing many eels, my brother brought the canoe, and placed it under the basket at a place where the water did not come, and raked the eels into it as they came. We made an opening in the basket, through which they fell, and we found the plan to work admirably. In about ten hours the stream had risen so high as to overflow the basket, which put an end to our operations for that night. We had then carried out about twelve wagon loads of suckers, three barrels of eels, two barrels of salmon and rock-fish, besides throwing a great quantity out of the basket. We then built a good, tight house of slabs, into
which we put our suckers, and threw over it a large quantity of pine and hemlock boughs, to prevent their freezing. We fed our fattening hogs for the next three weeks upon fish, when we commenced feeding them with corn, and at the end of the next four weeks the pork was equally as good as if fattened wholly upon corn. We then kept three hogs through the winter on fish. Our supply lasted until the middle of April.”

Other flesh foods that the pioneer found in the forest were the bison, the wild pigeon, the wild turkey. Dr. S. W. Fletcher, in his notable history of Pennsylvania agriculture, tells about some of these creatures. He tells of the last great flight of pigeons over Lancaster County—as late as 1846. “The dense mass of pigeons,” he wrote, “extended to the eastern horizon, and as far north and south as the eye could reach, and it was continuous from 12:30 to 4:30 p.m.” Dr. Fletcher says that in one day, in May of 1851, the American Express Company carried over the New York and Erie Railway to the New York markets more than seven tons of
Dr. Fletcher has this to say: "Herds of buffalo roamed Pennsylvania in pioneer days. These herds made annual migrations between Lake Erie and the Cumberland and Shenandoah valleys. In the autumn of 1773 a herd of more than twelve thousand passed along the West Branch of the Susquehanna on their annual migration. Hunters posted themselves along the deeply-worn trails and killed them by the hundreds."

Fish, fowl, and meat, however, were far from being the only foods that the pioneers got from Penn's Woods, for it contained a wealth of edible vegetable products. There is no better authority on this matter than the Rev. Joseph Doddridge, whose Notes form such an enlightening picture of life on the western frontier. His family moved to the region west of the Alleghenies in 1776. The area was still a wilderness, and Indians, snakes, wild beasts were all about. Doddridge's family, like all other pioneers, had to live largely upon native products.

"Blackberries grew in abundance," he wrote, "in those places where, shortly before the settlement of the country, the timber had been blown down by a hurricane. When ripe, which was in the time of harvest, the children and young people resorted to the fallen timber in large companies, under guard [italics mine], for the purpose of gathering the berries, of which tarts were often made for the harvest table. . . . Wild raspberries of an agreeable flavor were found in many places, but not plentiful anywhere. . . . Gooseberries of a small size, and very full of thorns, but of an agreeable taste, grew in some places in the woods. Whortleberries were never abundant in this section of the country, but they were in many places in the mountains, and many of them of excellent flavor. . . . Our autumn fruits were fall and winter grapes. Of these grapes we had several varieties and some of them were large and of excellent flavor.

"Black haws grew on large bushes along the moist bottoms of small streams. They grew in large clusters and ripened with the first frosts of the fall. Children were very fond of them. Red haws grew on white thorn bushes. They were of various kinds. The sugar haws, which were small, grew in large clusters, and when ripe were much esteemed. . . . Wild cherries were abundant in many places. The children were very fond of eating them. . . . Pawpaws were plenty along the great watercourses and on the rich
hills. Some people were fond of eating them. . . . The crabapple was very abundant along the smaller watercourses. Sour as the crabapples were, the children were very fond of eating them, especially when in winter they could find them under the leaves, where, defended against the frost, they acquired a fine golden color, a fragrant smell, and lost much of their sourness. The ladies were very fond of them for preserves.

"Of hickory nuts we had a great variety. Some of the larger shellbark nuts, with the exception of the thickness of their shells, were little inferior to the English walnut. Of white walnuts (butternuts) we generally had a great abundance. Of black walnuts many varieties as to size and amount of kernel. Hazels and chestnuts were plenty in many places."

With his sturdy little home, an amazing supply of food at hand ready for the gathering, the early settler was almost completely supplied. He did lack furnishings, tools, equipment of one sort or
another, but all the settler had to do was to make what he needed. The materials were just outside his door. McMinn, in his *On the Frontier with Colonel Antes*, gives us a good picture of this situation. He shows us the location that Antes chose for his home and his mill, on the south side of the Susquehanna, just by Long Island. Jersey Shore is just opposite the Antes' location. McMinn pictures Antes, who was skilled in carpenter work, as taking his boys into the nearby woods, showing them the different trees, and explaining what they were good for.

"The first tree they selected was an elm, the inner rind of which they wanted to make into chair bottoms (like rush seats), because it was strong and tough, and they also wanted some of the wood for cart wheel naves (hubs), because it would not easily split. Near the elm was a sassafras tree, which delighted the boys, for the bark of the root made a delicious beverage. It was a tonic to the blood and pleasant to the taste. The body of the tree was made into lengths to make bedsteads, for the wood was not only handsome, but bugs had an extreme aversion to the wood and positively refused to harbor near it.

"Not so far from the sassafras," McMinn continues, "was a wild cherry tree, which could not be neglected, for the bark soaked in water furnished a tonic that helped the appetite and restored the declining strength. Moreover, the color, texture, and smooth grain of the wood made it possible for its use in cabinet work, such as cupboards and boxes.

"They came to locust trees. These they wanted for posts to make sheds for the protection of their cattle, for they would resist the influence of the soil better than other woods and were easily split into the size and shape wanted. As the boys sought a spring to quench their thirst, they came to some birch trees, and the quantity and size of them suggested the uses to which the Indians put these trees. The men of the forest made dishes and boxes and canoes of the birch. The peculiarity of this bark was that it would not rot. The boys remembered that they could split the layers of this bark and write upon it with the ink that they made from the puffballs found on the scrub oaks. The leaves of one variety, and the twigs, too, made an excellent beverage that was even more pleasant than the sassafras. When the Indians made canoes of the birch bark, they sewed the strips together with the slender,
tough filaments of spruce and cedar roots and cemented the joints with turpentine (pitch) from the pine. Soon after, they came to a grove of beech trees, from which they gathered material for withes and switches. These served them in place of ropes in many uses about their stables and sleds and carts."

McMinn enumerates many other woods and tells of their helpfulness to the settlers. Then he gets around to dealing with the medicinal plants that grew so plentifully and tells about the remedies that the family physician—the mother of the family—made from these growths. Time was when we scorned these “old women’s doses.” But no more. Our doctors have come back to them. Indeed, there is a large New York firm, Penick and Company, that today operates five large farms, one near Reading, Pennsylvania, where they grow these medicinal herbs. Their operations run into many millions of dollars annually. Today, at vast expense, this great firm has to grow what the early settler had for the taking, like the innumerable other blessings that filled the forest.

At this distance, we recognize these blessings. We realize the wealth of gifts that the pioneer found in his forest home. But so deep-rooted was the hatred of the pioneers for the forest that they were blinded concerning the actual nature of the woods. This prejudice descended through the years. It has affected our own thinking about the forest. But now, after a century and three-quarters, we can look at the situation without prejudice and with clear eyes. It may have taken a long time to arrive at the truth about the forest, but today we know of a certainty that Pennsylvania is a commonwealth made of wood.