JOHN BURROUGHS

FRESH FIELDS

John Burroughs

Fresh Fields

Burroughs J.

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Содержание

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I
NATURE IN ENGLAND

I

The first whiff we got of transatlantic nature was the peaty breath of the peasant chimneys of Ireland while we were yet many miles at sea. What a homelike, fireside smell it was! it seemed to make something long forgotten stir within one. One recognizes it as a characteristic Old World odor, it savors so of the soil and of a ripe and mellow antiquity. I know no other fuel that yields so agreeable a perfume as peat. Unless the Irishman in one has dwindled to a very small fraction, he will be pretty sure to dilate his nostrils and feel some dim awakening of memory on catching the scent of this ancestral fuel. The fat, unctuous peat, – the pith and marrow of ages of vegetable growth, – how typical it is of much that lies there before us in the elder world; of the slow ripenings and accumulations, of extinct life and forms, decayed civilizations, of ten thousand growths and achievements of the hand and soul of man, now reduced to their last modicum of fertilizing mould!

With the breath of the chimney there came presently the chimney swallow, and dropped much fatigued upon the deck of the steamer. It was a still more welcome and suggestive token, – the bird of Virgil and of Theocritus, acquainted with every cottage roof and chimney in Europe, and with the ruined abbeys and castle walls. Except its lighter-colored breast, it seemed identical with our barn swallow; its little black cap appeared pulled down over its eyes in the same manner, and its glossy steel-blue coat, its forked tail, its infantile feet, and its cheerful twitter were the same. But its habits are different; for in Europe this swallow builds in chimneys, and the bird that answers to our chimney swallow, or swift, builds in crevices in barns and houses.

We did not suspect we had taken aboard our pilot in the little swallow, yet so it proved: this light navigator always hails from the port of bright, warm skies; and the next morning we found ourselves sailing between shores basking in full summer sunshine. Those who, after ten days of sorrowing and fasting in the desert of the ocean, have sailed up the Frith of Clyde, and thence up the Clyde to Glasgow, on the morning of a perfect mid-May day, the sky all sunshine, the earth all verdure, know what this experience is; and only those can know it. It takes a good many foul days in Scotland to breed one fair one; but when the fair day does come, it is worth the price paid for it. The soul and sentiment of all fair weather is in it; it is the flowering of the meteorological influences, the rose on this thorn of rain and mist. These fair days, I was told, may be quite confidently looked for in May; we were so fortunate as to experience a series of them, and the day we entered port was such a one as you would select from a hundred.

The traveler is in a mood to be pleased after clearing the Atlantic gulf; the eye in its exuberance is full of caresses and flattery, and the deck of a steamer is a rare vantage-ground on any occasion of sight-seeing; it affords just the isolation and elevation needed. Yet fully discounting these favorable conditions, the fact remains that Scotch sunshine is bewitching, and that the scenery of the Clyde is unequaled by any other approach to Europe. It is Europe, abridged and assorted and passed before you in the space of a few hours, – the highlands and lochs and castle-crowned crags on the one hand; and the lowlands, with their parks and farms, their manor halls and matchless verdure, on the other. The eye is conservative, and loves a look of permanence and order, of peace and contentment; and

these Scotch shores, with their stone houses, compact masonry, clean fields, grazing herds, ivied walls, massive foliage, perfect roads, verdant mountains, etc., fill all the conditions. We pause an hour in front of Greenock, and then, on the crest of the tide, make our way slowly upward. The landscape closes around us. We can almost hear the cattle ripping off the lush grass in the fields. One feels as if he could eat grass himself. It is pastoral paradise. We can see the daisies and buttercups; and from above a meadow on the right a part of the song of a skylark reaches my ear. Indeed, not a little of the charm and novelty of this part of the voyage was the impression it made as of going afield in an ocean steamer. We had suddenly passed from a wilderness of waters into a verdurous, sunlit landscape, where scarcely any water was visible. The Clyde, soon after you leave Greenock, becomes little more than a large, deep canal, inclosed between meadow banks, and from the deck of the great steamer only the most charming rural sights and sounds greet you. You are at sea amid verdant parks and fields of clover and grain. You behold farm occupations – sowing, planting, plowing – as from the middle of the Atlantic. Playful heifers and skipping lambs take the place of the leaping dolphins and the basking swordfish. The ship steers her way amid turnip-fields and broad acres of newly planted potatoes. You are not surprised that she needs piloting. A little tug with a rope at her bow pulls her first this way and then that, while one at her stern nudges her right flank and then her left. Presently we come to the ship-building yards of the Clyde, where rural, pastoral scenes are strangely mingled with those of quite another sort. "First a cow and then an iron ship," as one of the voyagers observed. Here a pasture or a meadow, or a field of wheat or oats, and close beside it, without an inch of waste or neutral ground between, rise the skeletons of innumerable ships, like a forest of slender growths of iron, with the workmen hammering amid it like so many noisy woodpeckers. It is doubtful if such a scene can be witnessed anywhere else in the world, – an enormous mechanical, commercial, and architectural interest, alternating with the quiet and simplicity of inland farms and home occupations. You could leap from the deck of a half-finished ocean steamer into a field of waving wheat or Winchester beans. These vast shipyards appear to be set down here upon the banks of the Clyde without any interference with the natural surroundings of the place.

Of the factories and foundries that put this iron in shape you get no hint; here the ships rise as if they sprouted from the soil, without waste or litter, but with an incessant din. They stand as thickly as a row of cattle in stanchions, almost touching each other, and in all stages of development. Now and then a stall will be vacant, the ship having just been launched, and others will be standing with flags flying and timbers greased or soaped, ready to take to the water at the word. Two such, both large ocean steamers, waited for us to pass. We looked back, saw the last block or wedge knocked away from one of them, and the monster ship sauntered down to the water and glided out into the current in the most gentle, nonchalant way imaginable. I wondered at her slow pace, and at the grace and composure with which she took to the water; the problem nicely studied and solved, – just power enough, and not an ounce to spare. The vessels are launched diagonally up or down stream, on account of the narrowness of the channel. But to see such a brood of ships, the largest in the world, hatched upon the banks of such a placid little river, amid such quiet country scenes, is a novel experience. But this is Britain, – a little island, with little lakes, little rivers, quiet, bosky fields, but mighty interests and power that reach round the world. I was conscious that the same scene at home would have been less pleasing. It would not have been so compact and tidy. There would not have been a garden of ships and a garden of turnips side by side; haymakers and shipbuilders in adjoining fields; milch-cows and iron steamers seeking the water within sight of each other. We leave wide margins and ragged edges in this country, and both man and nature sprawl about at greater lengths than in the Old World.

For the rest I was perhaps least prepared for the utter tranquillity, and shall I say domesticity, of the mountains. At a distance they appear to be covered with a tender green mould that one could brush away with his hand. On nearer approach it is seen to be grass. They look nearly as rural and pastoral as the fields. Goat Fell is steep and stony, but even it does not have a wild and barren look. At home, one thinks of a mountain as either a vast pile of barren, frowning rocks and precipices,

or else a steep acclivity covered with a tangle of primitive forest timber. But here, the mountains are high, grassy sheep-walks, smooth, treeless, rounded, and as green as if dipped in a fountain of perpetual spring. I did not wish my Catskills any different; but I wondered what would need to be done to them to make them look like these Scotch highlands. Cut away their forests, rub down all inequalities in their surfaces, pulverizing their loose bowlders; turf them over, leaving the rock to show through here and there, – then, with a few large black patches to represent the heather, and the softening and ameliorating effect of a mild, humid climate, they might in time come to bear some resemblance to these shepherd mountains. Then over all the landscape is that new look, – that mellow, legendary, half-human expression which nature wears in these ancestral lands, an expression familiar in pictures and in literature, but which a native of our side of the Atlantic has never before seen in gross, material objects and open-air spaces, – the added charm of the sentiment of time and human history, the ripening and ameliorating influence of long ages of close and loving occupation of the soil, – naturally a deep, fertile soil under a mild, very humid climate.

There is an unexpected, an unexplained lure and attraction in the landscape, – a pensive, reminiscent feeling in the air itself. Nature has grown mellow under these humid skies, as in our fiercer climate she grows harsh and severe. One sees at once why this fragrant Old World has so dominated the affections and the imaginations of our artists and poets: it is saturated with human qualities; it is unctuous with the ripeness of ages, the very marrowfat of time.

II

I had come to Great Britain less to see the noted sights and places than to observe the general face of nature. I wanted to steep myself long and well in that mellow, benign landscape, and put to further tests the impressions I had got of it during a hasty visit one autumn, eleven years before. Hence I was mainly intent on roaming about the country, it mattered little where. Like an attic stored with relics and heirlooms, there is no place in England where you cannot instantly turn from nature to scenes and places of deep historical or legendary or artistic interest.

My journal of travel is a brief one, and keeps to a few of the main lines. After spending a couple of days in Glasgow, we went down to Alloway, in Burns's country, and had our first taste of the beauty and sweetness of rural Britain, and of the privacy and comfort of a little Scotch inn. The weather was exceptionally fair, and the mellow Ayrshire landscape, threaded by the Doon, a perpetual delight. Thence we went north on a short tour through the Highlands, – up Loch Lomond, down Loch Katrine, and through the Trosachs to Callander, and thence to Stirling and Edinburgh. After a few days in the Scotch capital we set out for Carlyle's country, where we passed five delightful days. The next week found us in Wordsworth's land, and the 10th of June in London. After a week here I went down into Surrey and Hants, in quest of the nightingale, for four or five days. Till the middle of July I hovered about London, making frequent excursions into the country, – east, south, north, west, and once across the channel into France, where I had a long walk over the hills about Boulogne. July 15 we began our return journey northward, stopping a few days at Stratford, where I found the Red Horse Inn sadly degenerated from excess of travel. Thence again into the Lake region for a longer stay. From Grasmere we went into north Wales, and did the usual touring and sight-seeing around and over the mountains. The last week of July we were again in Glasgow, from which port we sailed on our homeward voyage July 29.

With a suitable companion, I should probably have made many long pedestrian tours. As it was, I took many short but delightful walks both in England and Scotland, with a half day's walk in the north of Ireland about Moville. 'Tis an admirable country to walk in, – the roads are so dry and smooth and of such easy grade, the footpaths so numerous and so bold, and the climate so cool and tonic. One night, with a friend, I walked from Rochester to Maidstone, part of the way in a slow rain and part of the way in the darkness. We had proposed to put up at some one of the little inns on the road, and get a view of the weald of Kent in the morning; but the inns refused us entertainment, and we were compelled to do the eight miles at night, stepping off very lively the last four in order to reach Maidstone before the hotels were shut up, which takes place at eleven o'clock. I learned this night how fragrant the English elder is while in bloom, and that distance lends enchantment to the smell. When I plucked the flowers, which seemed precisely like our own, the odor was rank and disagreeable; but at the distance of a few yards it floated upon the moist air, a spicy and pleasing perfume. The elder here grows to be a veritable tree; I saw specimens seven or eight inches in diameter and twenty feet high. In the morning we walked back by a different route, taking in Boxley Church, where the pilgrims used to pause on their way to Canterbury, and getting many good views of Kent grain-fields and hop-yards. Sometimes the road wound through the landscape like a footpath, with nothing between it and the rank-growing crops. An occasional newly-plowed field presented a curious appearance. The soil is upon the chalk formation, and is full of large fragments of flint. These work out upon the surface, and, being white and full of articulations and processes, give to the ground the appearance of being thickly strewn with bones, – with thigh bones greatly foreshortened. Yet these old bones in skillful hands make a most effective building material. They appear in all the old churches and ancient buildings in the south of England. Broken squarely off, the flint shows a fine semi-transparent surface that, in combination with coarser material, has a remarkable crystalline effect. One of the most delicious bits of architectural decoration I saw in England was produced, in the front wall of

one of the old buildings attached to the cathedral at Canterbury, by little squares of these flints in brick panel-work. The cool, pellucid, illuminating effect of the flint was just the proper foil to the warm, glowing, livid brick.

From Rochester we walked to Gravesend, over Gad's Hill; the day soft and warm, half sunshine, half shadow; the air full of the songs of skylarks; a rich, fertile landscape all about us; the waving wheat just in bloom, dashed with scarlet poppies; and presently, on the right, the Thames in view dotted with vessels. Seldom any cattle or grazing herds in Kent; the ground is too valuable; it is all given up to wheat, oats, barley, hops, fruit, and various garden produce.

A few days later we walked from Feversham to Canterbury, and from the top of Harbledown hill saw the magnificent cathedral suddenly break upon us as it did upon the footsore and worshipful pilgrims centuries ago. At this point, it is said, they knelt down, which seems quite probable, the view is so imposing. The cathedral stands out from and above the city, as if the latter were the foundation upon which it rested. On this walk we passed several of the famous cherry orchards of Kent, the thriftiest trees and the finest fruit I ever saw. We invaded one of the orchards, and proposed to purchase some of the fruit of the men engaged in gathering it. But they refused to sell it; had no right to do so, they said; but one of them followed us across the orchard, and said in a confidential way that he would see that we had some cherries. He filled my companion's hat, and accepted our shilling with alacrity. In getting back into the highway, over the wire fence, I got my clothes well tarred before I was aware of it. The fence proved to be well besmeared with a mixture of tar and grease, – an ingenious device for marking trespassers. We sat in the shade of a tree and ate our fruit and scraped our clothes, while a troop of bicyclists filed by. About the best glimpses I had of Canterbury cathedral – after the first view from Harbledown hill – were obtained while lying upon my back on the grass, under the shadow of its walls, and gazing up at the jackdaws flying about the central tower and going out and in weather-worn openings three hundred feet above me. There seemed to be some wild, pinnacled mountain peak or rocky ledge up there toward the sky, where the fowls of the air had made their nests, secure from molestation. The way the birds make themselves at home about these vast architectural piles is very pleasing. Doves, starlings, jackdaws, swallows, sparrows, take to them as to a wood or to a cliff. If there were only something to give a corresponding touch of nature or a throb of life inside! But their interiors are only impressive sepulchres, tombs within a tomb. Your own footfalls seem like the echo of past ages. These cathedrals belong to the pleistocene period of man's religious history, the period of gigantic forms. How vast, how monstrous, how terrible in beauty and power! but in our day as empty and dead as the shells upon the shore. The cold, thin ecclesiasticism that now masquerades in them hardly disturbs the dust in their central aisles. I saw five worshipers at the choral service in Canterbury, and about the same number of curious spectators. For my part, I could not take my eyes off the remnants of some of the old stained windows up aloft. If I worshiped at all, it was my devout admiration of those superb relics. There could be no doubt about the faith that inspired those. Below them were some gorgeous modern memorial windows: stained glass, indeed! loud, garish, thin, painty; while these were like a combination of precious stones and gems, full of depth and richness of tone, and, above all, serious, not courting your attention. My eye was not much taken with them at first, and not till after it had recoiled from the hard, thin glare in my immediate front.

From Canterbury I went to Dover, and spent part of a day walking along the cliffs to Folkestone. There is a good footpath that skirts the edge of the cliffs, and it is much frequented. It is characteristic of the compactness and neatness of this little island, that there is not an inch of waste land along this sea margin; the fertile rolling landscape, waving with wheat and barley, and with grass just ready for the scythe, is cut squarely off by the sea; the plow and the reaper come to the very brink of the chalky cliffs. As you sit down on Shakespeare's Cliff, with your feet dangling in the air at a height of three hundred and fifty feet, you can reach back and pluck the grain heads and the scarlet poppies. Never have I seen such quiet pastoral beauty take such a sudden leap into space. Yet the scene is tame in one sense: there is no hint of the wild and the savage; the rock is soft and friable, a kind of chalky

bread, which the sea devours readily; the hills are like freshly cut loaves; slice after slice has been eaten away by the hungry elements. Sitting here, I saw no "crows and choughs" winging "the midway air," but a species of hawk, "haggards of the rocks," were disturbed in the niches beneath me, and flew along from point to point.

> "The murmuring surge,
> That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes,
> Cannot be heard so high."

I had wondered why Shakespeare had made his seashores pebbly instead of sandy, and now I saw why: they are pebbly, with not a grain of sand to be found. This chalk formation, as I have already said, is full of flint nodules; and as the shore is eaten away by the sea, these rounded masses remain. They soon become worn into smooth pebbles, which beneath the pounding of the surf give out a strange clinking, rattling sound. Across the Channel, on the French side, there is more sand, but it is of the hue of mud and not pleasing to look upon.

Of other walks I had in England, I recall with pleasure a Sunday up the Thames toward Windsor: the day perfect, the river alive with row-boats, the shore swarming with pedestrians and picnickers; young athletic London, male and female, rushing forth as hungry for the open air and the water as young mountain herds for salt. I never saw or imagined anything like it. One shore of the Thames, sometimes the right, sometimes the left, it seems, belongs to the public. No private grounds, however lordly, are allowed to monopolize both sides.

Another walk was about Winchester and Salisbury, with more cathedral-viewing. One of the most human things to be seen in the great cathedrals is the carven image of some old knight or warrior prince resting above his tomb, with his feet upon his faithful dog. I was touched by this remembrance of the dog. In all cases he looked alert and watchful, as if guarding his master while he slept. I noticed that Cromwell's soldiers were less apt to batter off the nose and ears of the dog than they were those of the knight.

At Stratford I did more walking. After a row on the river, we strolled through the low, grassy field in front of the church, redolent of cattle and clover, and sat for an hour on the margin of the stream and enjoyed the pastoral beauty and the sunshine. In the afternoon (it was Sunday) I walked across the fields to Shottery, and then followed the road as it wound amid the quaint little thatched cottages till it ended at a stile from which a footpath led across broad, sunny fields to a stately highway. To give a more minute account of English country scenes and sounds in midsummer, I will here copy some jottings in my note-book, made then and there: —

"*July 16.* In the fields beyond Shottery. Bright and breezy, with appearance of slight showers in the distance. Thermometer probably about seventy; a good working temperature. Clover – white, red, and yellow (white predominating) – in the fields all about me. The red very ruddy; the white large. The only noticeable bird voice that of the yellow-hammer, two or three being within ear-shot. The song is much like certain sparrow songs, only inferior: *Sip, sip, sip, see-e-e-e*; or, *If if, if you ple-e-ease*. Honey-bees on the white clover. Turf very thick and springy, supporting two or three kinds of grass resembling red-top and bearded rye-grass. Narrow-leaved plantain, a few buttercups, a small yellow flower unknown to me (probably ladies' fingers), also a species of dandelion and prunella. The land thrown into marked swells twenty feet broad. Two Sunday-school girls lying on the grass in the other end of the field. A number of young men playing some game, perhaps cards, seated on the ground in an adjoining field. Scarcely any signs of midsummer to me; no ripeness or maturity in nature yet. The grass very tender and succulent, the streams full and roily. Yarrow and cinquefoil also in the grass where I sit. The plantain in bloom and fragrant. Along the Avon, the meadow-sweet in full bloom, with a fine cinnamon odor. A wild rose here and there in the hedge-rows. The wild clematis nearly ready to bloom, in appearance almost identical with our own. The wheat and oats full-grown, but not yet turning. The clouds soft and fleecy. Prunella dark purple. A few paces farther on I enter a highway,

one of the broadest I have seen, the roadbed hard and smooth as usual, about sixteen feet wide, with grassy margins twelve feet wide, redolent with white and red clover. A rich farming landscape spreads around me, with blue hills in the far west. Cool and fresh like June. Bumblebees here and there, more hairy than at home. A plow in a field by the roadside is so heavy I can barely move it, – at least three times as heavy as an American plow; beam very long, tails four inches square, the mould-board a thick plank. The soil like putty; where it dries, crumbling into small, hard lumps, but sticky and tough when damp, – Shakespeare's soil, the finest and most versatile wit of the world, the product of a sticky, stubborn clay-bank. Here is a field where every alternate swell is small. The large swells heave up in a very molten-like way – real turfy billows, crested with white clover-blossoms."

"*July 17.* On the road to Warwick, two miles from Stratford. Morning bright, with sky full of white, soft, high-piled thunderheads. Plenty of pink blackberry blossoms along the road; herb Robert in bloom, and a kind of Solomon's-seal as at home, and what appears to be a species of goldenrod with a midsummery smell. The note of the yellow-hammer and the wren here and there. Beech-trees loaded with mast and humming with bumblebees, probably gathering honey-dew, which seems to be more abundant here than with us. The landscape like a well-kept park dotted with great trees, which make islands of shade in a sea of grass. Droves of sheep grazing, and herds of cattle reposing in the succulent fields. Now the just felt breeze brings me the rattle of a mowing-machine, a rare sound here, as most of the grass is cut by hand. The great motionless arms of a windmill rising here and there above the horizon. A gentleman's turnout goes by with glittering wheels and spanking team; the footman in livery behind, the gentleman driving. I hear his brake scrape as he puts it on down the gentle descent. Now a lark goes off. Then the mellow horn of a cow or heifer is heard. Then the bleat of sheep. The crows caw hoarsely. Few houses by the roadside, but here and there behind the trees in the distance. I hear the greenfinch, stronger and sharper than our goldfinch, but less pleasing. The matured look of some fields of grass alone suggests midsummer. Several species of mint by the roadside, also certain white umbelliferous plants. Everywhere that royal weed of Britain, the nettle. Shapely piles of road material and pounded stone at regular distances, every fragment of which will go through a two-inch ring. The roads are mended only in winter, and are kept as smooth and hard as a rock. No swells or 'thank-y'-ma'ams' in them to turn the water; they shed the water like a rounded pavement. On the hill, three miles from Stratford, where a finger-post points you to Hampton Lucy, I turn and see the spire of Shakespeare's church between the trees. It lies in a broad, gentle valley, and rises above much foliage. 'I hope and praise God it will keep foine,' said the old woman at whose little cottage I stopped for ginger-beer, attracted by a sign in the window. 'One penny, sir, if you please. I made it myself, sir. I do not leave the front door unfastened' (undoing it to let me out) 'when I am down in the garden.' A weasel runs across the road in front of me, and is scolded by a little bird. The body of a dead hedgehog festering beside the hedge. A species of St. John's-wort in bloom, teasels, and a small convolvulus. Also a species of plantain with a head large as my finger, purple tinged with white. Road margins wide, grassy, and fragrant with clover. Privet in bloom in the hedges, panicles of small white flowers faintly sweet-scented. 'As clean and white as privet when it flowers,' says Tennyson in 'Walking to the Mail.' The road and avenue between noble trees, beech, ash, elm, and oak. All the fields are bounded by lines of stately trees; the distance is black with them. A large thistle by the roadside, with homeless bumblebees on the heads as at home, some of them white-faced and stingless. Thistles rare in this country. Weeds of all kinds rare except the nettle. The place to see the Scotch thistle is not in Scotland or England, but in America."

III

England is like the margin of a spring-run, near its source, – always green, always cool, always moist, comparatively free from frost in winter and from drought in summer. The spring-run to which it owes this character is the Gulf Stream, which brings out of the pit of the southern ocean what the fountain brings out of the bowels of the earth – a uniform temperature, low but constant; a fog in winter, a cloud in summer. The spirit of gentle, fertilizing summer rain perhaps never took such tangible and topographical shape before. Cloud-evolved, cloud-enveloped, cloud-protected, it fills the eye of the American traveler with a vision of greenness such as he has never before dreamed of; a greenness born of perpetual May, tender, untarnished, ever renewed, and as uniform and all-pervading as the rain-drops that fall, covering mountain, cliff, and vale alike. The softened, rounded, flowing outlines given to our landscape by a deep fall of snow are given to the English by this depth of vegetable mould and this all-prevailing verdure which it supports. Indeed, it is caught upon the shelves and projections of the rocks as if it fell from the clouds, – a kind of green snow, – and it clings to their rough or slanting sides like moist flakes. In the little valleys and chasms it appears to lie deepest. Only the peaks and broken rocky crests of the highest Scotch and Cumberland mountains are bare. Adown their treeless sides the moist, fresh greenness fairly drips. Grass, grass, grass, and evermore grass. Is there another country under the sun so becushioned, becarpeted, and becurtained with grass? Even the woods are full of grass, and I have seen them mowing in a forest. Grass grows upon the rocks, upon the walls, on the tops of the old castles, on the roofs of the houses, and in winter the hay-seed sometimes sprouts upon the backs of the sheep. Turf used as capping to a stone fence thrives and blooms as if upon the ground. There seems to be a deposit from the atmosphere, – a slow but steady accumulation of a black, peaty mould upon all exposed surfaces, – that by and by supports some of the lower or cryptogamous forms of vegetation. These decay and add to the soil, till thus in time grass and other plants will grow. The walls of the old castles and cathedrals support a variety of plant life. On Rochester Castle I saw two or three species of large wild flowers growing one hundred feet from the ground and tempting the tourist to perilous reachings and climbings to get them. The very stones seem to sprout. My companion made a sketch of a striking group of red and white flowers blooming far up on one of the buttresses of Rochester Cathedral. The soil will climb to any height. Indeed, there seems to be a kind of finer soil floating in the air. How else can one account for the general smut of the human face and hands in this country, and the impossibility of keeping his own clean? The unwashed hand here quickly leaves its mark on whatever it touches. A prolonged neglect of soap and water, and I think one would be presently covered with a fine green mould, like that upon the boles of the trees in the woods. If the rains were not occasionally heavy enough to clean them off, I have no doubt that the roofs of all buildings in England would in a few years be covered with turf, and that daisies and buttercups would bloom upon them. How quickly all new buildings take on the prevailing look of age and mellowness! One needs to have seen the great architectural piles and monuments of Britain to appreciate Shakespeare's line, —

"That unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish Time."

He must also have seen those Scotch or Cumberland mountains to appreciate the descriptive force of this other line, —

"The turfy mountains where live the nibbling sheep."

The turfy mountains are the unswept stones that have held and utilized their ever-increasing capital of dirt. These vast rocky eminences are stuffed and padded with peat; it is the sooty soil of the housetops and of the grimy human hand, deepened and accumulated till it nourishes the finest, sweetest grass.

It was this turfy and grassy character of these mountains – I am tempted to say their cushionary character – that no reading or picture viewing of mine had prepared me for. In the cut or on canvas they appeared like hard and frowning rocks; and here I beheld them as green and succulent as any meadow-bank in April or May, – vast, elevated sheep-walks and rabbit-warrens, treeless, shrubless, generally without loose bowlders, shelving rocks, or sheer precipices; often rounded, feminine, dimpled, or impressing one as if the rock had been thrust up beneath an immense stretch of the finest lawn, and had carried the turf with it heavenward, rending it here and there, but preserving acres of it intact.

In Scotland I ascended Ben Venue, not one of the highest or ruggedest of the Scotch mountains, but a fair sample of them, and my foot was seldom off the grass or bog, often sinking into them as into a saturated sponge. Where I expected a dry course, I found a wet one. The thick, springy turf was oozing with water. Instead of being balked by precipices, I was hindered by swamps. Where a tangle of brush or a chaos of bowlders should have detained me, I was picking my way as through a wet meadow-bottom tilted up at an angle of forty-five degrees. My feet became soaked when my shins should have been bruised. Occasionally, a large deposit of peat in some favored place had given way beneath the strain of much water, and left a black chasm a few yards wide and a yard or more deep. Cold spring-runs were abundant, wild flowers few, grass universal. A loping hare started up before me; a pair of ringed ousels took a hasty glance at me from behind a rock; sheep and lambs, the latter white and conspicuous beside their dingy and all but invisible dams, were scattered here and there; the wheat-ear uncovered its white rump as it flitted from rock to rock, and the mountain pipit displayed its larklike tail. No sound of wind in the trees; there were no trees, no seared branches and trunks that so enhance and set off the wildness of our mountain-tops. On the summit the wind whistled around the outcropping rocks and hummed among the heather, but the great mountain did not purr or roar like one covered with forests.

I lingered for an hour or more, and gazed upon the stretch of mountain and vale about me. The summit of Ben Lomond, eight or ten miles to the west, rose a few hundred feet above me. On four peaks I could see snow or miniature glaciers. Only four or five houses, mostly humble shepherd dwellings, were visible in that wide circuit. The sun shone out at intervals; the driving clouds floated low, their keels scraping the rocks of some of the higher summits. The atmosphere was filled with a curious white film, like water tinged with milk, an effect only produced at home by a fine mist. "A certain tameness in the view, after all," I recorded in my note-book on the spot, "perhaps because of the trim and grassy character of the mountain; not solemn and impressive; no sense of age or power. The rock crops out everywhere, but it can hardly look you in the face; it is crumbling and insignificant; shows no frowning walls, no tremendous cleavage; nothing overhanging and precipitous; no wrath and revel of the elder gods."

Even in rugged Scotland nature is scarcely wilder than a mountain sheep, certainly a good way short of the ferity of the moose and caribou. There is everywhere marked repose and moderation in the scenery, a kind of aboriginal Scotch canniness and propriety that gives one a new sensation. On and about Ben Nevis there is barrenness, cragginess, and desolation; but the characteristic feature of wild Scotch scenery is the moor, lifted up into mountains, covering low, broad hills, or stretching away in undulating plains, black, silent, melancholy, it may be, but never savage or especially wild. "The vast and yet not savage solitude," Carlyle says, referring to these moorlands. The soil is black and peaty, often boggy; the heather short and uniform as prairie grass; a shepherd's cottage or a sportsman's "box" stuck here and there amid the hills. The highland cattle are shaggy and picturesque, but the moors and mountains are close cropped and uniform. The solitude is not that of a forest full of still forms and dim vistas, but of wide, open, sombre spaces. Nature did not look alien or unfriendly to me; there must be barrenness or some savage threatening feature in the landscape to produce this impression; but the heather and whin are like a permanent shadow, and one longs to see the trees stand up and wave their branches. The torrents leaping down off the mountains are very welcome to both

eye and ear. And the lakes – nothing can be prettier than Loch Lomond and Loch Katrine, though one wishes for some of the superfluous rocks of the New World to give their beauty a granite setting.

IV

It is characteristic of nature in England that most of the stone with which the old bridges, churches, and cathedrals are built is so soft that people carve their initials in it with their jack-knives, as we do in the bark of a tree or in a piece of pine timber. At Stratford a card has been posted upon the outside of the old church, imploring visitors to refrain from this barbarous practice. One sees names and dates there more than a century old. Often, in leaning over the parapets of the bridges along the highways, I would find them covered with letters and figures. Tourists have made such havoc chipping off fragments from the old Brig o' Doon in Burns's country, that the parapet has had to be repaired. One could cut out the key of the arch with his pocket-knife. And yet these old structures outlast empires. A few miles from Glasgow I saw the remains of an old Roman bridge, the arch apparently as perfect as when the first Roman chariot passed over it, probably fifteen centuries ago. No wheels but those of time pass over it in these later centuries, and these seem to be driven slowly and gently in this land, with but little wear and tear to the ancient highways.

England is not a country of granite and marble, but of chalk, marl, and clay. The old Plutonic gods do not assert themselves; they are buried and turned to dust, and the more modern humanistic divinities bear sway. The land is a green cemetery of extinct rude forces. Where the highway or the railway gashed the hills deeply, I could seldom tell where the soil ended and the rock began, as they gradually assimilated, blended, and became one.

And this is the key to nature in England: 'tis granite grown ripe and mellow and issuing in grass and verdure; 'tis aboriginal force and fecundity become docile and equable and mounting toward higher forms, – the harsh, bitter rind of the earth grown sweet and edible. There is such body and substance in the color and presence of things that one thinks the very roots of the grass must go deeper than usual. The crude, the raw, the discordant, where are they? It seems a comparatively short and easy step from nature to the canvas or to the poem in this cozy land. Nothing need be added; the idealization has already taken place. The Old World is deeply covered with a kind of human leaf-mould, while the New is for the most part yet raw, undigested hard-pan. This is why these scenes haunt one like a memory. One seems to have youthful associations with every field and hilltop he looks upon. The complete humanization of nature has taken place. The soil has been mixed with human thought and substance. These fields have been alternately Celt, Roman, British, Norman, Saxon; they have moved and walked and talked and loved and suffered; hence one feels kindred to them and at home among them. The mother-land, indeed. Every foot of its soil has given birth to a human being and grown tender and conscious with time.

England is like a seat by the chimney-corner, and is as redolent of human occupancy and domesticity. It has the island coziness and unity, and the island simplicity as opposed to the continental diversity of forms. It is all one neighborhood; a friendly and familiar air is over all. It satisfies to the full one's utmost craving for the home-like and for the fruits of affectionate occupation of the soil. It does not satisfy one's craving for the wild, the savage, the aboriginal, what our poet describes as his

> "Hungering, hungering, hungering for primal energies and Nature's dauntlessness."

But probably in the matter of natural scenes we hunger most for that which we most do feed upon. At any rate, I can conceive that one might be easily contented with what the English landscape affords him.

The whole physiognomy of the land bespeaks the action of slow, uniform, conservative agencies. There is an elemental composure and moderation in things that leave their mark everywhere, – a sort of elemental sweetness and docility that are a surprise and a charm. One does

not forget that the evolution of man probably occurred in this hemisphere, and time would seem to have proved that there is something here more favorable to his perpetuity and longevity.

The dominant impression of the English landscape is repose. Never was such a restful land to the eye, especially to the American eye, sated as it is very apt to be with the mingled squalor and splendor of its own landscape, its violent contrasts, and general spirit of unrest. But the completeness and composure of this outdoor nature is like a dream. It is like the poise of the tide at its full: every hurt of the world is healed, every shore covered, every unsightly spot is hidden. The circle of the horizon is brimming with the green equable flood. (I did not see the fens of Lincolnshire nor the wolds of York.) This look of repose is partly the result of the maturity and ripeness brought about by time and ages of patient and thorough husbandry, and partly the result of the gentle, continent spirit of Nature herself. She is contented, she is happily wedded, she is well clothed and fed. Her offspring swarm about her, her paths have fallen in pleasant places. The foliage of the trees, how dense and massive! The turf of the fields, how thick and uniform! The streams and rivers, how placid and full, showing no devastated margins, no widespread sandy wastes and unsightly heaps of drift bowlders! To the returned traveler the foliage of the trees and groves of New England and New York looks thin and disheveled when compared with the foliage he has just left. This effect is probably owing to our cruder soil and sharper climate. The aspect of our trees in midsummer is as if the hair of their heads stood on end; the woods have a wild, frightened look, or as if they were just recovering from a debauch. In our intense light and heat, the leaves, instead of spreading themselves full to the sun and crowding out upon the ends of the branches as they do in England, retreat, as it were, hide behind each other, stand edgewise, perpendicular, or at any angle, to avoid the direct rays. In Britain, from the slow, dripping rains and the excessive moisture, the leaves of the trees droop more, and the branches are more pendent. The rays of light are fewer and feebler, and the foliage disposes itself so as to catch them all, and thus presents a fuller and broader surface to the eye of the beholder. The leaves are massed upon the outer ends of the branches, while the interior of the tree is comparatively leafless. The European plane-tree is like a tent. The foliage is all on the outside. The bird voices in it reverberate as in a chamber.

"The pillar'd dusk of sounding sycamores,"

says Tennyson. At a little distance, it has the mass and solidity of a rock. The same is true of the European maple, and when this tree is grown on our side of the Atlantic it keeps up its Old World habits. I have for several years taken note of a few of them growing in a park near my home. They have less grace and delicacy of outline than our native maple, but present a darker and more solid mass of foliage. The leaves are larger and less feathery, and are crowded to the periphery of the tree. Nearly every summer one of the trees, which is most exposed, gets the leaves on one side badly scorched. When the foliage begins to turn in the fall, the trees appear as if they had been lightly and hastily brushed with gold. The outer edges of the branches become a light yellow, while, a little deeper, the body of the foliage is still green. It is this solid and sculpturesque character of the English foliage that so fills the eye of the artist. The feathery, formless, indefinite, not to say thin, aspect of our leafage is much less easy to paint, and much less pleasing when painted.

The same is true of the turf in the fields and upon the hills. The sward with us, even in the oldest meadows, will wear more or less a ragged, uneven aspect. The frost heaves it, the sun parches it; it is thin here and thick there, crabbed in one spot and fine and soft in another. Only by the frequent use of a heavy roller, copious waterings, and top-dressings, can we produce sod that approaches in beauty even that of the elevated sheep ranges in England and Scotland.

The greater activity and abundance of the earthworm, as disclosed by Darwin, probably has much to do with the smoothness and fatness of those fields when contrasted with our own. This little yet mighty engine is much less instrumental in leavening and leveling the soil in New England than in Old. The greater humidity of the mother country, the deep clayey soil, its fattening for ages

by human occupancy, the abundance of food, the milder climate, etc., are all favorable to the life and activity of the earthworm. Indeed, according to Darwin, the gardener that has made England a garden is none other than this little obscure creature. It plows, drains, airs, pulverizes, fertilizes, and levels. It cannot transport rocks and stone, but it can bury them; it cannot remove the ancient walls and pavements, but it can undermine them and deposit its rich castings above them. On each acre of land, he says, "in many parts of England, a weight of more than ten tons of dry earth annually passes through their bodies and is brought to the surface." "When we behold a wide, turf-covered expanse," he further observes, "we should remember that its smoothness, on which so much of its beauty depends, is mainly due to all the inequalities having been slowly leveled by worms."

The small part which worms play in this direction in our landscape is, I am convinced, more than neutralized by our violent or disrupting climate; but England looks like the product of some such gentle, tireless, and beneficent agent. I have referred to that effect in the face of the landscape as if the soil had snowed down; it seems the snow came from the other direction, namely, from below, but was deposited with equal gentleness and uniformity.

The repose and equipoise of nature of which I have spoken appears in the fields of grain no less than in the turf and foliage. One may see vast stretches of wheat, oats, barley, beans, etc., as uniform as the surface of a lake, every stalk of grain or bean the size and height of every other stalk. This, of course, means good husbandry; it means a mild, even-tempered nature back of it, also. Then the repose of the English landscape is enhanced, rather than marred, by the part man has played in it. How those old arched bridges rest above the placid streams; how easily they conduct the trim, perfect highways over them! Where the foot finds an easy way, the eye finds the same; where the body finds harmony, the mind finds harmony. Those ivy-covered walls and ruins, those finished fields, those rounded hedge-rows, those embowered cottages, and that gray, massive architecture, all contribute to the harmony and to the repose of the landscape. Perhaps in no other country are the grazing herds so much at ease. One's first impression, on seeing British fields in spring or summer, is that the cattle and sheep have all broken into the meadow and have not yet been discovered by the farmer; they have taken their fill, and are now reposing upon the grass or dreaming under the trees. But you presently perceive that it is all meadow or meadow-like; that there are no wild, weedy, or barren pastures about which the herds toil; but that they are in grass up to their eyes everywhere. Hence their contentment; hence another element of repose in the landscape.

The softness and humidity of the English climate act in two ways in promoting that marvelous greenness of the land, namely, by growth and by decay. As the grass springs quickly, so its matured stalk or dry leaf decays quickly. No field growths are desiccated and preserved as with us; there are no dried stubble and seared leaves remaining over the winter to mar and obscure the verdancy of spring. Every dead thing is quickly converted back to vegetable mould. In the woods, in May, it is difficult to find any of the dry leaves of the previous autumn; in the fields and copses and along the highways, no stalk of weed or grass remains; while our wild, uplying pastures and mountain-tops always present a more or less brown and seared appearance from the dried and bleached stalks of the growth of the previous year, through which the fresh springing grass is scarcely visible. Where rain falls on nearly three hundred days in the year, as in the British islands, the conversion of the mould into grass, and *vice versa*, takes place very rapidly.

II
ENGLISH WOODS: A CONTRAST

One cannot well overpraise the rural and pastoral beauty of England – the beauty of her fields, parks, downs, holms. In England you shall see at its full that of which you catch only glimpses in this country, the broad, beaming, hospitable beauty of a perfectly cultivated landscape. Indeed, to see England is to take one's fill of the orderly, the permanent, the well-kept in the works of man, and of the continent, the beneficent, the uniform, in the works of nature. It is to see the most perfect bit of garden lawn extended till it covers an empire; it is to see the history of two thousand years written in grass and verdure, and in the lines of the landscape; a continent concentrated into a state, the deserts and waste places left out, every rood of it swarming with life; the pith and marrow of wide tracts compacted into narrow fields and recruited and forwarded by the most vigilant husbandry. Those fields look stall-fed, those cattle beam contentment, those rivers have never left their banks; those mountains are the paradise of shepherds; those open forest glades, half sylvan, half pastoral, clean, stately, full of long vistas and cathedral-like aisles, – where else can one find beauty like that? The wild and the savage flee away. The rocks pull the green turf over them like coverlids; the hills are plump with vegetable mould, and when they bend this way or that, their sides are wrinkled and dimpled like the forms of fatted sheep. And fatted they are; not merely by the care of man, but by the elements themselves; the sky rains fertility upon them; there is no wear and tear as with our alternately flooded, parched, and frozen hilltops; the soil accumulates, the mould deepens; the matted turf binds it and yearly adds to it.

All this is not simply because man is or has been so potent in the landscape (this is but half the truth), but because the very mood and humor of Nature herself is domestic and human. She seems to have grown up with man and taken on his look and ways. Her spirit is that of the full, placid stream that you may lead through your garden or conduct by your doorstep without other danger than a wet sill or a soaked flower-plot, at rare intervals. It is the opulent nature of the southern seas, brought by the Gulf Stream, and reproduced and perpetuated here under these cool northern skies, the fangs and the poison taken out; full, but no longer feverish; lusty, but no longer lewd.

Yet there is a certain beauty of nature to be had in much fuller measure in our own country than in England, – the beauty of the wild, the aboriginal, – the beauty of primitive forests, – the beauty of lichen-covered rocks and ledges. The lichen is one of the lowest and humblest forms of vegetable growth, but think how much it adds to the beauty of all our wild scenery, giving to our mountain walls and drift bowlders the softest and most pleasing tints. The rocky escarpments of New York and New England hills are frescoed by Time himself, painted as with the brush of the eternal elements. But the lichen is much less conspicuous in England, and plays no such part in her natural scenery. The climate is too damp. The rocks in Wales and Northumberland and in Scotland are dark and cold and unattractive. The trees in the woods do not wear the mottled suit of soft gray ours do. The bark of the British beech is smooth and close-fitting, and often tinged with a green mould. The Scotch pine is clad as in a ragged suit of leather. Nature uses mosses instead of lichens. The old walls and housetops are covered with moss – a higher form of vegetation than lichens. Its decay soon accumulates a little soil or vegetable mould, which presently supports flowering plants.

Neither are there any rocks in England worth mentioning; no granite bowlders, no fern-decked or moss-covered fragments scattered through the woods, as with us. They have all been used up for building purposes, or for road-making, or else have quite dissolved in the humid climate. I saw rocks in Wales, quite a profusion of them in the pass of Llanberis, but they were tame indeed in comparison with such rock scenery as that say at Lake Mohunk, in the Shawangunk range in New York. There are passes in the Catskills that for the grandeur of wildness and savageness far surpass

anything the Welsh mountains have to show. Then for exquisite and thrilling beauty, probably one of our mottled rocky walls with the dicentra blooming from little niches and shelves in April, and the columbine thrusting out from seams and crevices clusters of its orange bells in May, with ferns and mosses clinging here and there, and the woodbine tracing a delicate green line across its face, cannot be matched anywhere in the world.

Then, in our woods, apart from their treasures of rocks, there is a certain beauty and purity unknown in England, a certain delicacy and sweetness, and charm of unsophisticated nature, that are native to our forests.

The pastoral or field life of nature in England is so rank and full, that no woods or forests that I was able to find could hold their own against it for a moment. It flooded them like a tide. The grass grows luxuriantly in the thick woods, and where the grass fails, the coarse bracken takes its place. There was no wood spirit, no wild wood air. Our forests shut their doors against the fields; they shut out the strong light and the heat. Where the land has been long cleared, the woods put out a screen of low branches, or else a brushy growth starts up along their borders that guards and protects their privacy. Lift or part away these branches, and step inside, and you are in another world; new plants, new flowers, new birds, new animals, new insects, new sounds, new odors; in fact, an entirely different atmosphere and presence. Dry leaves cover the ground, delicate ferns and mosses drape the rocks, shy, delicate flowers gleam out here and there, the slender brown wood-frog leaps nimbly away from your feet, the little red newt fills its infantile pipe, or hides under a leaf, the ruffed grouse bursts up before you, the gray squirrel leaps from tree to tree, the wood pewee utters its plaintive cry, the little warblers lisp and dart amid the branches, and sooner or later the mosquito demands his fee. Our woods suggest new arts, new pleasures, a new mode of life. English parks and groves, when the sun shines, suggest a perpetual picnic, or Maying party; but no one, I imagine, thinks of camping out in English woods. The constant rains, the darkened skies, the low temperature, make the interior of a forest as uninviting as an underground passage. I wondered what became of the dry leaves that are such a feature and give out such a pleasing odor in our woods. They are probably raked up and carried away; or, if left upon the ground, are quickly resolved into mould by the damp climate.

While in Scotland I explored a large tract of woodland, mainly of Scotch fir, that covers a hill near Ecclefechan, but it was grassy and uninviting. In one of the parks of the Duke of Hamilton, I found a deep wooded gorge through which flowed the river Avon (I saw four rivers of this name in Great Britain), a branch of the Clyde, – a dark, rock-paved stream, the color of brown stout. It was the wildest bit of forest scenery I saw anywhere. I almost imagined myself on the headwaters of the Hudson or the Penobscot. The stillness, the solitude, the wild boiling waters, were impressive; but the woods had no charm; there were no flowers, no birds; the sylvan folk had moved away long ago, and their house was cold and inhospitable. I sat a half-hour in their dark nettle-grown halls by the verge of the creek, to see if they were stirring anywhere, but they were not. I did, indeed, hear part of a wren's song, and the call of the sandpiper; but that was all. Not one purely wood voice or sound or odor. But looking into the air a few yards below me, there leapt one of those matchless stone bridges, clearing the profound gulf and carrying the road over as securely as if upon the geological strata. It was the bow of art and civilization set against nature's wildness. In the woods beyond, I came suddenly upon the ruins of an old castle, with great trees growing out of it, and rabbits burrowing beneath it. One learns that it takes more than a collection of trees to make a forest, as we know it in this country. Unless they house that spirit of wildness and purity like a temple, they fail to satisfy. In walking to Selborne, I skirted Wolmer Forest, but it had an uninviting look. The Hanger on the hill above Selborne, which remains nearly as it was in White's time, – a thrifty forest of beeches, – I explored, but found it like the others, without any distinctive woodsy attraction – only so much soil covered with dripping beeches, too dense for a park and too tame for a forest. The soil is a greasy, slippery clay, and down the steepest part of the hill, amid the trees, the boys have a slide that serves them for summer "coastings." Hardly a leaf, hardly a twig or branch, to be found. In White's

time, the poor people used to pick up the sticks the crows dropped in building their nests, and they probably do so yet. When one comes upon the glades beyond the Hanger, the mingling of groves and grassy common, the eye is fully content. The beech, which is the prevailing tree here, as it is in many other parts of England, is a much finer tree than the American beech. The deep limestone soil seems especially adapted to it. It grows as large as our elm, with much the same manner of branching. The trunk is not patched and mottled with gray, like ours, but is often tinged with a fine deep green mould. The beeches that stand across the road in front of Wordsworth's house, at Rydal Mount, have boles nearly as green as the surrounding hills. The bark of this tree is smooth and close-fitting, and shows that muscular, athletic character of the tree beneath it which justifies Spenser's phrase, "the warlike beech." These beeches develop finely in the open, and make superb shade-trees along the highway. All the great historical forests of England – Shrewsbury Forest, the Forest of Dean, New Forest, etc. – have practically disappeared. Remnants of them remain here and there, but the country they once occupied is now essentially pastoral.

It is noteworthy that there is little or no love of woods as such in English poetry; no fond mention of them, and dwelling upon them. The muse of Britain's rural poetry has none of the wide-eyedness and furtiveness of the sylvan creatures; she is rather a gentle, wholesome, slightly stupid divinity of the fields. Milton sings the praises of

"Arched walks of twilight groves."

But his wood is a "drear wood,"

"The nodding horror of whose shady brows

Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger."

Again: —

"Very desolation dwells
By grots and caverns shagg'd with horrid shade."

Shakespeare refers to the "ruthless, vast, and horrid wood," – a fit place for robbery, rapine, and murder. Indeed, English poetry is pretty well colored with the memory of the time when the woods were the hiding-places of robbers and outlaws, and were the scenes of all manner of dark deeds. The only thing I recall in Shakespeare that gives a faint whiff of our forest life occurs in "All's Well That Ends Well," where the clown says to Lafeu, "I am a woodland fellow, sir, that always loved a great fire." That great fire is American; wood is too scarce in Europe. Francis Higginson wrote in 1630: "New England may boast of the element of fire more than all the rest; for all Europe is not able to afford to make so great fires as New England. A poor servant, that is to possess but fifty acres, may afford to give more wood for fire, as good as the world yields, than many noblemen in England." In many parts of New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, the same royal fires may still be indulged in. In the chief nature-poet of England, Wordsworth, there is no line that has the subtle aroma of the deep woods. After seeing his country, one can recognize its features, its spirit, all through his poems – its impressive solitudes, its lonely tarns, its silent fells, its green dales, its voiceful waterfalls; but there are no woods there to speak of; the mountains appear to have always been treeless, and the poet's muse has never felt the spell of this phase of nature – the mystery and attraction of the indoors of aboriginal wildness. Likewise in Tennyson there is the breath of the wold, but not of the woods.

Among our own poets, two at least of the more eminent have listened to the siren of our primitive woods. I refer to Bryant and Emerson. Though so different, there is an Indian's love of forests and forest-solitudes in them both. Neither Bryant's "Forest Hymn" nor Emerson's "Woodnotes" could have been written by an English poet. The "Woodnotes" savor of our vast Northern pine forests, amid which one walks with distended pupil, and a boding, alert sense.

"In unploughed Maine he sought the lumberers' gang,

Where from a hundred lakes young rivers sprang;
He trode the unplanted forest floor, whereon
The all-seeing sun for ages hath not shone;
Where feeds the moose, and walks the surly bear,
And up the tall mast runs the woodpecker.
He saw beneath dim aisles, in odorous beds,
The slight Linnæa hang its twin-born heads,
And blessed the monument of the man of flowers,
Which breathes his sweet fame through the northern bowers.
He heard, when in the grove, at intervals,
With sudden roar the aged pine-tree falls, —
One crash, the death-hymn of the perfect tree,
Declares the close of its green century."

Emerson's muse is urbane, but it is that wise urbanity that is at home in the woods as well as in the town, and can make a garden of a forest.

"My garden is a forest ledge,
Which older forests bound;
The banks slope down to the blue lake-edge,
Then plunge to depths profound."

On the other hand, we have no pastoral poetry in the English sense, because we have no pastoral nature as overpowering as the English have. When the muse of our poetry is not imitative, it often has a piny, woodsy flavor, that is unknown in the older literatures. The gentle muse of Longfellow, so civil, so cultivated; yet how it delighted in all legends and echoes and Arcadian dreams, that date from the forest primeval. Thoreau was a wood-genius – the spirit of some Indian poet or prophet, graduated at Harvard College, but never losing his taste for the wild. The shy, mystical genius of Hawthorne was never more at home than when in the woods. Read the forest-scenes in the "Scarlet Letter." They are among the most suggestive in the book.

III
IN CARLYLE'S COUNTRY

In crossing the sea a second time, I was more curious to see Scotland than England, partly because I had had a good glimpse of the latter country eleven years before, but largely because I had always preferred the Scotch people to the English (I had seen and known more of them in my youth), and especially because just then I was much absorbed with Carlyle, and wanted to see with my own eyes the land and the race from which he sprang.

I suspect anyhow I am more strongly attracted by the Celt than by the Anglo-Saxon; at least by the individual Celt. Collectively the Anglo-Saxon is the more impressive; his triumphs are greater; the face of his country and of his cities is the more pleasing; the gift of empire is his. Yet there can be no doubt, I think, that the Celts, at least the Scotch Celts, are a more hearty, cordial, and hospitable people than the English; they have more curiosity, more raciness, and quicker and surer sympathies. They fuse and blend readily with another people, which the English seldom do. In this country John Bull is usually like a pebble in the clay; grind him and press him and bake him as you will, he is still a pebble – a hard spot in the brick, but not essentially a part of it.

Every close view I got of the Scotch character confirmed my liking for it. A most pleasant episode happened to me down in Ayr. A young man whom I stumbled on by chance in a little wood by the Doon, during some conversation about the birds that were singing around us, quoted my own name to me. This led to an acquaintance with the family and with the parish minister, and gave a genuine human coloring to our brief sojourn in Burns's country. In Glasgow I had an inside view of a household a little lower in the social scale, but high in the scale of virtues and excellences. I climbed up many winding stone stairs and found the family in three or four rooms on the top floor: a father, mother, three sons, two of them grown, and a daughter, also grown. The father and the sons worked in an iron foundry near by. I broke bread with them around the table in the little cluttered kitchen, and was spared apologies as much as if we had been seated at a banquet in a baronial hall. A Bible chapter was read after we were seated at table, each member of the family reading a verse alternately. When the meal was over, we went into the next room, where all joined in singing some Scotch songs, mainly from Burns. One of the sons possessed the finest bass voice I had ever listened to. Its power was simply tremendous, well tempered with the Scotch raciness and tenderness, too. He had taken the first prize at a public singing bout, open to competition to all of Scotland. I told his mother, who also had a voice of wonderful sweetness, that such a gift would make her son's fortune anywhere, and found that the subject was the cause of much anxiety to her. She feared lest it should be the ruination of him – lest he should prostitute it to the service of the devil, as she put it, rather than use it to the glory of God. She said she had rather follow him to his grave than see him in the opera or concert hall, singing for money. She wanted him to stick to his work, and use his voice only as a pious and sacred gift. When I asked the young man to come and sing for us at the hotel, the mother was greatly troubled, as she afterward told me, till she learned we were stopping at a temperance house. But the young man seemed not at all inclined to break away from the advice of his mother. The other son had a sweetheart who had gone to America, and he was looking longingly thitherward. He showed me her picture, and did not at all attempt to conceal from me, or from his family, his interest in the original. Indeed, one would have said there were no secrets or concealments in such a family, and the thorough unaffected piety of the whole household, mingled with so much that was human and racy and canny, made an impression upon me I shall not soon forget. This family was probably an exceptional one, but it tinges all my recollections of smoky, tall-chimneyed Glasgow.

A Scotch trait of quite another sort, and more suggestive of Burns than of Carlyle, was briefly summarized in an item of statistics which I used to read in one of the Edinburgh papers every Monday

morning, namely, that of the births registered during the previous week, invariably from ten to twelve per cent. were illegitimate. The Scotch – all classes of them – love Burns deep down in their hearts, because he has expressed them, from the roots up, as none other has.

When I think of Edinburgh the vision that comes before my mind's eye is of a city presided over, and shone upon as it were, by two green treeless heights. Arthur's Seat is like a great irregular orb or half-orb, rising above the near horizon there in the southeast, and dominating city and country with its unbroken verdancy. Its greenness seems almost to pervade the air itself – a slight radiance of grass, there in the eastern skies. No description of Edinburgh I had read had prepared me for the striking hill features that look down upon it. There is a series of three hills which culminate in Arthur's Seat, 800 feet high. Upon the first and smaller hill stands the Castle. This is a craggy, precipitous rock, on three sides, but sloping down into a broad gentle expanse toward the east, where the old city of Edinburgh is mainly built, – as if it had flowed out of the Castle as out of a fountain, and spread over the adjacent ground. Just beyond the point where it ceases rise Salisbury Crags to a height of 570 feet, turning to the city a sheer wall of rocks like the Palisades of the Hudson. From its brink eastward again, the ground slopes in a broad expanse of greensward to a valley called Hunter's Bog, where I thought the hunters were very quiet and very numerous until I saw they were city riflemen engaged in target practice; thence it rises irregularly to the crest of Arthur's Seat, forming the pastoral eminence and green-shining disk to which I have referred. Along the crest of Salisbury Crags the thick turf comes to the edge of the precipices, as one might stretch a carpet. It is so firm and compact that the boys cut their initials in it, on a large scale, with their jack-knives, as in the bark of a tree. Arthur's Seat was a favorite walk of Carlyle's during those gloomy days in Edinburgh in 1820-21. It was a mount of vision to him, and he apparently went there every day when the weather permitted. [Note: See letter to his brother John, March 9, 1821.

There was no road in Scotland or England which I should have been so glad to have walked over as that from Edinburgh to Ecclefechan, – a distance covered many times by the feet of him whose birth and burial place I was about to visit. Carlyle as a young man had walked it with Edward Irving (the Scotch say "travel" when they mean going afoot), and he had walked it alone, and as a lad with an elder boy, on his way to Edinburgh college. He says in his "Reminiscences" he nowhere else had such affectionate, sad, thoughtful, and, in fact, interesting and salutary journeys. "No company to you but the rustle of the grass under foot, the tinkling of the brook, or the voices of innocent, primeval things." "I have had days as clear as Italy (as in this Irving case); days moist and dripping, overhung with the infinite of silent gray, – and perhaps the latter were the preferable, in certain moods. You had the world and its waste imbroglios of joy and woe, of light and darkness, to yourself alone. You could strip barefoot, if it suited better; carry shoes and socks over shoulder, hung on your stick; clean shirt and comb were in your pocket; *omnia mea mecum porto*. You lodged with shepherds, who had clean, solid cottages; wholesome eggs, milk, oatmeal porridge, clean blankets to their beds, and a great deal of human sense and unadulterated natural politeness."

But how can one walk a hundred miles in cool blood without a companion, especially when the trains run every hour, and he has a surplus sovereign in his pocket? One saves time and consults his ease by riding, but he thereby misses the real savor of the land. And the roads of this compact little kingdom are so inviting, like a hard, smooth surface covered with sand-paper! How easily the foot puts them behind it! And the summer weather, – what a fresh under-stratum the air has even on the warmest days! Every breath one draws has a cool, invigorating core to it, as if there might be some unmelted, or just melted, frost not far off.

But as we did not walk, there was satisfaction in knowing that the engine which took our train down from Edinburgh was named Thomas Carlyle. The cognomen looked well on the toiling, fiery-hearted, iron-browed monster. I think its original owner would have contemplated it with grim pleasure, especially since he confesses to having spent some time, once, in trying to look up a

shipmaster who had named his vessel for him. Here was a hero after his own sort, a leader by the divine right of the expansive power of steam.

The human faculties of observation have not yet adjusted themselves to the flying train. Steam has clapped wings to our shoulders without the power to soar; we get bird's-eye views without the bird's eyes or the bird's elevation, distance without breadth, detail without mass. If such speed only gave us a proportionate extent of view, if this leisure of the eye were only mated to an equal leisure in the glance! Indeed, when one thinks of it, how near railway traveling, as a means of seeing a country, comes, except in the discomforts of it, to being no traveling at all! It is like being tied to your chair, and being jolted and shoved about at home. The landscape is turned topsy-turvy. The eye sustains unnatural relations to all but the most distant objects. We move in an arbitrary plane, and seldom is anything seen from the proper point, or with the proper sympathy of coordinate position. We shall have to wait for the air ship to give us the triumph over space in which the eye can share. Of this flight south from Edinburgh on that bright summer day, I keep only the most general impression. I recall how clean and naked the country looked, lifted up in broad hill-slopes, naked of forests and trees and weedy, bushy growths, and of everything that would hide or obscure its unbroken verdancy, – the one impression that of a universe of grass, as in the arctic regions it might be one of snow; the mountains, pastoral solitudes; the vales, emerald vistas.

Not to be entirely cheated out of my walk, I left the train at Lockerbie, a small Scotch market town, and accomplished the remainder of the journey to Ecclefechan on foot, a brief six-mile pull. It was the first day of June; the afternoon sun was shining brightly. It was still the honeymoon of travel with me, not yet two weeks in the bonnie land; the road was smooth and clean as the floor of a sea beach, and firmer, and my feet devoured the distance with right good will. The first red clover had just bloomed, as I probably would have found it that day had I taken a walk at home; but, like the people I met, it had a ruddier cheek than at home. I observed it on other occasions, and later in the season, and noted that it had more color than in this country, and held its bloom longer. All grains and grasses ripen slower there than here, the season is so much longer and cooler. The pink and ruddy tints are more common in the flowers also. The bloom of the blackberry is often of a decided pink, and certain white, umbelliferous plants, like yarrow, have now and then a rosy tinge. The little white daisy ("gowan," the Scotch call it) is tipped with crimson, foretelling the scarlet poppies, with which the grain fields will by and by be splashed. Prunella (self-heal), also, is of a deeper purple than with us, and a species of cranesbill, like our wild geranium, is of a much deeper and stronger color. On the other hand, their ripened fruits and foliage of autumn pale their ineffectual colors beside our own.

Among the farm occupations, that which most took my eye, on this and on other occasions, was the furrowing of the land for turnips and potatoes; it is done with such absolute precision. It recalled Emerson's statement that the fields in this island look as if finished with a pencil instead of a plow, – a pencil and a ruler in this case, the lines were so straight and so uniform. I asked a farmer at work by the roadside how he managed it. "Ah," said he, "a Scotchman's head is level." Both here and in England, plowing is studied like a fine art; they have plowing matches, and offer prizes for the best furrow. In planting both potatoes and turnips the ground is treated alike, grubbed, plowed, cross-plowed, crushed, harrowed, chain-harrowed, and rolled. Every sod and tuft of uprooted grass is carefully picked up by women and boys, and burned or carted away; leaving the surface of the ground like a clean sheet of paper, upon which the plowman is now to inscribe his perfect lines. The plow is drawn by two horses; it is a long, heavy tool, with double mould-boards, and throws the earth each way. In opening the first furrow the plowman is guided by stakes; having got this one perfect, it is used as the model for every subsequent one, and the land is thrown into ridges as uniform and faultless as if it had been stamped at one stroke with a die, or cast in a mould. It is so from one end of the island to the other; the same expert seems to have done the work in every plowed and planted field.

Four miles from Lockerbie I came to Mainhill, the name of a farm where the Carlyle family lived many years, and where Carlyle first read Goethe, "in a dry ditch," Froude says, and translated

"Wilhelm Meister." The land drops gently away to the south and east, opening up broad views in these directions, but it does not seem to be the bleak and windy place Froude describes it. The crops looked good, and the fields smooth and fertile. The soil is rather a stubborn clay, nearly the same as one sees everywhere. A sloping field adjoining the highway was being got ready for turnips. The ridges had been cast; the farmer, a courteous but serious and reserved man, was sprinkling some commercial fertilizer in the furrows from a bag slung across his shoulders, while a boy, with a horse and cart, was depositing stable manure in the same furrows, which a lassie, in clogs and short skirts, was evenly distributing with a fork. Certain work in Scotch fields always seems to be done by women and girls, – spreading manure, pulling weeds, and picking up sods, – while they take an equal hand with the men in the hay and harvest fields.

The Carlyles were living on this farm while their son was teaching school at Annan, and later at Kirkcaldy with Irving, and they supplied him with cheese, butter, ham, oatmeal, etc., from their scanty stores. A new farmhouse has been built since then, though the old one is still standing; doubtless the same Carlyle's father refers to in a letter to his son, in 1817, as being under way. The parish minister was expected at Mainhill. "Your mother was very anxious to have the house done before he came, or else she said she would run over the hill and hide herself."

From Mainhill the highway descends slowly to the village of Ecclefechan, the site of which is marked to the eye, a mile or more away, by the spire of the church rising up against a background of Scotch firs, which clothe a hill beyond. I soon entered the main street of the village, which in Carlyle's youth had an open burn or creek flowing through the centre of it. This has been covered over by some enterprising citizen, and instead of a loitering little burn, crossed by numerous bridges, the eye is now greeted by a broad expanse of small cobble-stone. The cottages are for the most part very humble, and rise from the outer edges of the pavement, as if the latter had been turned up and shaped to make their walls. The church is a handsome brown stone structure, of recent date, and is more in keeping with the fine fertile country about than with the little village in its front. In the cemetery back of it, Carlyle lies buried. As I approached, a girl sat by the roadside, near the gate, combing her black locks and arranging her toilet; waiting, as it proved, for her mother and brother, who lingered in the village. A couple of boys were cutting nettles against the hedge; for the pigs, they said, after the sting had been taken out of them by boiling. Across the street from the cemetery the cows of the villagers were grazing.

I must have thought it would be as easy to distinguish Carlyle's grave from the others as it was to distinguish the man while living, or his fame when dead; for it never occurred to me to ask in what part of the inclosure it was placed. Hence, when I found myself inside the gate, which opens from the Annan road through a high stone wall, I followed the most worn path toward a new and imposing-looking monument on the far side of the cemetery; and the edge of my fine emotion was a good deal dulled against the marble when I found it bore a strange name. I tried others, and still others, but was disappointed. I found a long row of Carlyles, but he whom I sought was not among them. My pilgrim enthusiasm felt itself needlessly hindered and chilled. How many rebuffs could one stand? Carlyle dead, then, was the same as Carlyle living; sure to take you down a peg or two when you came to lay your homage at his feet.

Presently I saw "Thomas Carlyle" on a big marble slab that stood in a family inclosure. But this turned out to be the name of a nephew of the great Thomas. However, I had struck the right plat at last; here were the Carlyles I was looking for, within a space probably of eight by sixteen feet, surrounded by a high iron fence. The latest made grave was higher and fuller than the rest, but it had no stone or mark of any kind to distinguish it. Since my visit, I believe, a stone or monument of some kind has been put up. A few daisies and the pretty blue-eyed speedwell were growing amid the grass upon it. The great man lies with his head toward the south or southwest, with his mother, sister, and father to the right of him, and his brother John to the left. I was glad to learn that the high iron fence was not his own suggestion. His father had put it around the family plat in his lifetime. Carlyle

would have liked to have it cut down about half way. The whole look of this cemetery, except in the extraordinary size of the headstones, was quite American, it being back of the church, and separated from it, a kind of mortuary garden, instead of surrounding it and running under it, as is the case with the older churches. I noted here, as I did elsewhere, that the custom prevails of putting the trade or occupation of the deceased upon his stone: So-and-So, mason, or tailor, or carpenter, or farmer, etc.

A young man and his wife were working in a nursery of young trees, a few paces from the graves, and I conversed with them through a thin place in the hedge. They said they had seen Carlyle many times, and seemed to hold him in proper esteem and reverence. The young man had seen him come in summer and stand, with uncovered head, beside the graves of his father and mother. "And long and reverently did he remain there, too," said the young gardener. I learned this was Carlyle's invariable custom: every summer did he make a pilgrimage to this spot, and with bared head linger beside these graves. The last time he came, which was a couple of years before he died, he was so feeble that two persons sustained him while he walked into the cemetery. This observance recalls a passage from his "Past and Present." Speaking of the religious custom of the Emperor of China, he says, "He and his three hundred millions (it is their chief punctuality) visit yearly the Tombs of their Fathers; each man the Tomb of his Father and his Mother; alone there in silence with what of 'worship' or of other thought there may be, pauses solemnly each man; the divine Skies all silent over him; the divine Graves, and this divinest Grave, all silent under him; the pulsings of his own soul, if he have any soul, alone audible. Truly it may be a kind of worship! Truly, if a man cannot get some glimpse into the Eternities, looking through this portal, – through what other need he try it?"

Carlyle's reverence and affection for his kindred were among his most beautiful traits, and make up in some measure for the contempt he felt toward the rest of mankind. The family stamp was never more strongly set upon a man, and no family ever had a more original, deeply cut pattern than that of the Carlyles. Generally, in great men who emerge from obscure peasant homes, the genius of the family takes an enormous leap, or is completely metamorphosed; but Carlyle keeps all the paternal lineaments unfaded; he is his father and his mother, touched to finer issues. That wonderful speech of his sire, which all who knew him feared, has lost nothing in the son, but is tremendously augmented, and cuts like a Damascus sword, or crushes like a sledge-hammer. The strongest and finest paternal traits have survived in him. Indeed, a little congenital rill seems to have come all the way down from the old vikings. Carlyle is not merely Scotch; he is Norselandic. There is a marked Scandinavian flavor in him; a touch, or more than a touch, of the rude, brawling, bullying, hard-hitting, wrestling viking times. The hammer of Thor antedates the hammer of his stone-mason sire in him. He is Scotland, past and present, moral and physical. John Knox and the Covenanters survive in him: witness his religious zeal, his depth and solemnity of conviction, his strugglings and agonizings, his "conversion." Ossian survives in him: behold that melancholy retrospect, that gloom, that melodious wail. And especially, as I have said, do his immediate ancestors survive in him, – his sturdy, toiling, fiery-tongued, clannish yeoman progenitors: all are summed up here; this is the net result available for literature in the nineteenth century.

Carlyle's heart was always here in Scotland. A vague, yearning homesickness seemed ever to possess him. "The Hill I first saw the Sun rise over," he says in "Past and Present," "when the Sun and I and all things were yet in their auroral hour, who can divorce me from it? Mystic, deep as the world's centre, are the roots I have struck into my Native Soil; no *tree* that grows is rooted so." How that mournful retrospective glance haunts his pages! His race, generation upon generation, had toiled and wrought here amid the lonely moors, had wrestled with poverty and privation, had wrung the earth for a scanty subsistence, till they had become identified with the soil, kindred with it. How strong the family ties had grown in the struggle; how the sentiment of home was fostered! Then the Carlyles were men who lavished their heart and conscience upon their work; they builded themselves, their days, their thoughts and sorrows, into their houses; they leavened the soil with the sweat of their rugged brows. When James Carlyle, his father, after a lapse of fifty years, saw Auldgarth bridge,

upon which he had worked as a lad, he was deeply moved. When Carlyle in his turn saw it, and remembered his father and all he had told him, he also was deeply moved. "It was as if half a century of past time had fatefully for moments turned back." Whatever these men touched with their hands in honest toil became sacred to them, a page out of their own lives. A silent, inarticulate kind of religion they put into their work. All this bore fruit in their distinguished descendant. It gave him that reverted, half mournful gaze; the ground was hallowed behind him; his dead called to him from their graves. Nothing deepens and intensifies family traits like poverty and toil and suffering. It is the furnace heat that brings out the characters, the pressure that makes the strata perfect. One recalls Carlyle's grandmother getting her children up late at night, his father one of them, to break their long fast with oaten cakes from the meal that had but just arrived; making the fire from straw taken from their beds. Surely, such things reach the springs of being.

It seemed eminently fit that Carlyle's dust should rest here in his native soil, with that of his kindred, he was so thoroughly one of them, and that his place should be next his mother's, between whom and himself there existed such strong affection. I recall a little glimpse he gives of his mother in a letter to his brother John, while the latter was studying in Germany. His mother had visited him in Edinburgh. "I had her," he writes, "at the pier of Leith, and showed her where your ship vanished; and she looked over the blue waters eastward with wettish eyes, and asked the dumb waves 'when he would be back again.' Good mother."

To see more of Ecclefechan and its people, and to browse more at my leisure about the country, I brought my wife and youngster down from Lockerbie; and we spent several days there, putting up at the quiet and cleanly little Bush Inn. I tramped much about the neighborhood, noting the birds, the wild flowers, the people, the farm occupations, etc.; going one afternoon to Scotsbrig, where the Carlyles lived after they left Mainhill, and where both father and mother died; one day to Annan, another to Repentance Hill, another over the hill toward Kirtlebridge, tasting the land, and finding it good. It is an evidence of how permanent and unchanging things are here that the house where Carlyle was born, eighty-seven years ago, and which his father built, stands just as it did then, and looks good for several hundred years more. In going up to the little room where he first saw the light, one ascends the much-worn but original stone stairs, and treads upon the original stone floors. I suspect that even the window panes in the little window remain the same. The village is a very quiet and humble one, paved with small cobble-stone, over which one hears the clatter of the wooden clogs, the same as in Carlyle's early days. The pavement comes quite up to the low, modest, stone-floored houses, and one steps from the street directly into most of them. When an Englishman or a Scotchman of the humbler ranks builds a house in the country, he either turns its back upon the highway, or places it several rods distant from it, with sheds or stables between; or else he surrounds it with a high, massive fence, shutting out your view entirely. In the village he crowds it to the front; continues the street pavement into his hall, if he can; allows no fence or screen between it and the street, but makes the communication between the two as easy and open as possible. At least this is the case with most of the older houses. Hence village houses and cottages in Britain are far less private and secluded than ours, and country houses far less public. The only feature of Ecclefechan, besides the church, that distinguishes it from the humblest peasant village of a hundred years ago, is the large, fine stone structure used for the public school. It confers a sort of distinction upon the place, as if it were in some way connected with the memory of its famous son. I think I was informed that he had some hand in founding it. The building in which he first attended school is a low, humble dwelling, that now stands behind the church, and forms part of the boundary between the cemetery and the Annan road.

From our window I used to watch the laborers on their way to their work, the children going to school, or to the pump for water, and night and morning the women bringing in their cows from the pasture to be milked. In the long June gloaming the evening milking was not done till about nine o'clock. On two occasions, the first in a brisk rain, a bedraggled, forlorn, deeply-hooded, youngish woman, came slowly through the street, pausing here and there, and singing in wild, melancholy, and

not unpleasing strains. Her voice had a strange piercing plaintiveness and wildness. Now and then some passer-by would toss a penny at her feet. The pretty Edinburgh lass, her hair redder than Scotch gold, that waited upon us at the inn, went out in the rain and put a penny in her hand. After a few pennies had been collected the music would stop, and the singer disappear, – to drink up her gains, I half suspect, but do not know. I noticed that she was never treated with rudeness or disrespect. The boys would pause and regard her occasionally, but made no remark, or gesture, or grimace. One afternoon a traveling show pitched its tent in the broader part of the street, and by diligent grinding of a hand-organ summoned all the children of the place to see the wonders. The admission was one penny, and I went in with the rest, and saw the little man, the big dog, the happy family, and the gaping, dirty-faced, but orderly crowd of boys and girls. The Ecclefechan boys, with some of whom I tried, not very successfully, to scrape an acquaintance, I found a sober, quiet, modest set, shy of strangers, and, like all country boys, incipient naturalists. If you want to know where the birds'-nests are, ask the boys. Hence, one Sunday afternoon, meeting a couple of them on the Annan road, I put the inquiry. They looked rather blank and unresponsive at first; but I made them understand I was in earnest, and wished to be shown some nests. To stimulate their ornithology I offered a penny for the first nest, twopence for the second, threepence for the third, etc., – a reward that, as it turned out, lightened my burden of British copper considerably; for these boys appeared to know every nest in the neighborhood, and I suspect had just then been making Sunday calls upon their feathered friends. They turned about, with a bashful smile, but without a word, and marched me a few paces along the road, when they stepped to the hedge, and showed me a hedge-sparrow's nest with young. The mother bird was near, with food in her beak. This nest is a great favorite of the cuckoo, and is the one to which Shakespeare refers: —

"The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long
That it's had it head bit off by it young."

The bird is not a sparrow at all, but is a warbler, closely related to the nightingale. Then they conducted me along a pretty by-road, and parted away the branches, and showed me a sparrow's nest with eggs in it. A group of wild pansies, the first I had seen, made bright the bank near it. Next, after conferring a moment soberly together, they took me to a robin's nest, – a warm, mossy structure in the side of the bank. Then we wheeled up another road, and they disclosed the nest of the yellow yite, or yellow-hammer, a bird of the sparrow kind, also upon the ground. It seemed to have a little platform of coarse, dry stalks, like a door-stone, in front of it. In the mean time they had showed me several nests of the hedge-sparrow, and one of the shilfa, or chaffinch, that had been "harried," as the boys said, or robbed. These were gratuitous and merely by the way. Then they pointed out to me the nest of a tomtit in a disused pump that stood near the cemetery; after which they proposed to conduct me to a chaffinch's nest and a blackbird's nest; but I said I had already seen several of these and my curiosity was satisfied. Did they know any others? Yes, several of them; beyond the village, on the Middlebie road, they knew a wren's nest with eighteen eggs in it. Well, I would see that, and that would be enough; the coppers were changing pockets too fast. So through the village we went, and along the Middlebie road for nearly a mile. The boys were as grave and silent as if they were attending a funeral; not a remark, not a smile. We walked rapidly. The afternoon was warm, for Scotland, and the tips of their ears glowed through their locks, as they wiped their brows. I began to feel as if I had had about enough walking myself. "Boys, how much farther is it?" I said. "A wee bit farther, sir;" and presently, by their increasing pace, I knew we were nearing it. It proved to be the nest of the willow wren, or willow warbler, an exquisite structure, with a dome or canopy above it, the cavity lined with feathers and crowded with eggs. But it did not contain eighteen. The boys said they had been told that the bird would lay as many as eighteen eggs; but it is the common wren that lays this number, – even more. What struck me most was the gravity and silent earnestness of the

boys. As we walked back they showed me more nests that had been harried. The elder boy's name was Thomas. He had heard of Thomas Carlyle; but when I asked him what he thought of him, he only looked awkwardly upon the ground.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.