

JOHN BURROUGHS

RIVERBY

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PREFATORY NOTE

I have often said to myself, "Why should not one name his books as he names his children, arbitrarily, and let the name come to mean much or little, as the case may be?" In the case of the present volume – probably my last collection of Out-of-door Papers – I have taken this course, and have given to the book the name of my place here on the Hudson, "Riverby," by the river, where the sketches were written, and where for so many years I have been an interested spectator of the life of nature, as, with the changing seasons, it has ebbed and flowed past my door.

J. B.

I AMONG THE WILD FLOWERS

I

Nearly every season I make the acquaintance of one or more new flowers. It takes years to exhaust the botanical treasures of any one considerable neighborhood, unless one makes a dead set at it, like an herbalist. One likes to have his floral acquaintances come to him easily and naturally, like his other friends. Some pleasant occasion should bring you together. You meet in a walk, or touch elbows on a picnic under a tree, or get acquainted on a fishing or camping-out expedition. What comes to you in the way of birds or flowers, while wooing only the large spirit of open-air nature, seems like special good fortune. At any rate, one does not want to bolt his botany, but rather to prolong the course. One likes to have something in reserve, something to be on the lookout for on his walks. I have never yet found the orchid called calypso, a large, variegated purple and yellow flower, Gray says, which grows in cold, wet woods and bogs, – very beautiful and very rare. Calypso, you know, was the nymph who fell in love with Ulysses and detained him seven years upon her island, and died of a broken heart after he left her. I have a keen desire to see

her in her floral guise, reigning over some silent bog, or rising above the moss of some dark glen in the woods, and would gladly be the Ulysses to be detained at least a few hours by her.

I will describe her by the aid of Gray, so that if any of my readers come across her they may know what a rarity they have found. She may be looked for in cold, mossy, boggy places in our northern woods. You will see a low flower, somewhat like a lady's-slipper, that is, with an inflated sac-shaped lip; the petals and sepals much alike, rising and spreading; the color mingled purple and yellow; the stem, or scape, from three to five inches high, with but one leaf, – that one thin and slightly heart-shaped, with a stem which starts from a solid bulb. That is the nymph of our boggy solitudes, waiting to break her heart for any adventurous hero who may penetrate her domain.

Several of our harmless little wild flowers have been absurdly named out of the old mythologies: thus, Indian cucumber root, one of Thoreau's favorite flowers, is named after the sorceress Medea, and is called "medeola," because it was at one time thought to possess rare medicinal properties; and medicine and sorcery have always been more or less confounded in the opinion of mankind. It is a pretty and decorative sort of plant, with, when perfect, two stages or platforms of leaves, one above the other. You see a whorl of five or six leaves, a foot or more from the ground, which seems to bear a standard with another whorl of three leaves at the top of it. The small, colorless, recurved flowers shoot out from above this top whorl. The whole expression of

the plant is singularly slender and graceful. Sometimes, probably the first year, it only attains to the first circle of leaves. This is the platform from which it will rear its flower column the next year. Its white, tuberous root is crisp and tender, and leaves in the mouth distinctly the taste of cucumber. Whether or not the Indians used it as a relish as we do the cucumber, I do not know.

Still another pretty flower that perpetuates the name of a Grecian nymph, a flower that was a new find to me a few summers ago, is the arethusa. Arethusa was one of the nymphs who attended Diana, and was by that goddess turned into a fountain, that she might escape the god of the river, Alpheus, who became desperately in love with her on seeing her at her bath. Our Arethusa is one of the prettiest of the orchids, and has been pursued through many a marsh and quaking bog by her lovers. She is a bright pink-purple flower an inch or more long, with the odor of sweet violets. The sepals and petals rise up and arch over the column, which we may call the heart of the flower, as if shielding it. In Plymouth County, Massachusetts, where the arethusa seems common, I have heard it called Indian pink.

But I was going to recount my new finds. One sprang up in the footsteps of that destroying angel, Dynamite. A new railroad cut across my tramping-ground, with its hordes of Italian laborers and its mountains of giant-powder, etc., was enough to banish all the gentler deities forever from the place. But it did not.

Scarcely had the earthquake passed when, walking at the base of a rocky cliff that had been partly blown away in the search

for stone for two huge abutments that stood near by, I beheld the débris at the base of the cliff draped and festooned by one of our most beautiful foliage plants, and one I had long been on the lookout for, namely, the climbing fumitory. It was growing everywhere in the greatest profusion, affording, by its tenderness, delicacy, and grace, the most striking contrast to the destruction the black giant had wrought. The power that had smote the rock seemed to have called it into being. Probably the seeds had lain dormant in cracks and crevices for years, and when the catastrophe came, and they found themselves in new soil amid the wreck of the old order of things, they sprang into new life, and grew as if the world had been created anew for them, as in a sense it had. Certainly, they grew most luxuriantly, and never was the ruin wrought by powder veiled by more delicate, lace-like foliage.¹ The panicles of drooping, pale flesh-colored flowers heightened the effect of the whole. This plant is a regular climber; it has no extra appendages for that purpose, and does not wind, but climbs by means of its young leafstalks, which lay hold like tiny hands or hooks. The end of every branch is armed with a multitude of these baby hands. The flowers are pendent, and swing like ear jewels. They are slightly heart-shaped, and when examined closely look like little pockets made of crumpled silk, nearly white on the inside or under side, and pale purple on the side toward the light, and shirred up at the bottom. And pockets

¹ Strange to say, the plant did not appear in that locality the next season, and has never appeared since. Perhaps it will take another dynamite earthquake to wake it up.

they are in quite a literal sense, for, though they fade, they do not fall, but become pockets full of seeds. The fumitory is a perpetual bloomer from July till killed by the autumn frosts.

The closely allied species of this plant, the dicentra (Dutchman's breeches and squirrel corn), are much more common, and are among our prettiest spring flowers. I have an eye out for the white-hearts (related to the bleeding-hearts of the gardens, and absurdly called "Dutchman's breeches") the last week in April. It is a rock-loving plant, and springs upon the shelves of the ledges, or in the débris at their base, as if by magic. As soon as blood-root has begun to star the waste, stony places, and the first swallow has been heard in the sky, we are on the lookout for dicentra. The more northern species, called "squirrel corn" from the small golden tubers at its root, blooms in May, and has the fragrance of hyacinths. It does not affect the rocks, like all the other flowers of this family.

My second new acquaintance the same season was the showy lady's-slipper. Most of the floral ladies leave their slippers in swampy places in the woods; only the stemless one (*acaulis*) leaves hers on dry ground before she reaches the swamp, commonly under evergreen trees, where the carpet of pine needles will not hurt her feet. But one may penetrate many wet, mucky places in the woods before he finds the prettiest of them all, the showy lady's-slipper, – the prettiest slipper, but the stoutest and coarsest plant; the flower large and very showy, white, tinged with purple in front; the stem two feet high,

very leafy, and coarser than bear-weed. Report had come to me, through my botanizing neighbor, that in a certain quaking sphagnum bog in the woods the showy lady's-slipper could be found. The locality proved to be the marrowy grave of an extinct lake or black tarn. On the borders of it the white azalea was in bloom, fast fading. In the midst of it were spruces and black ash and giant ferns, and, low in the spongy, mossy bottom, the pitcher plant. The lady's-slipper grew in little groups and companies all about. Never have I beheld a prettier sight, – so gay, so festive, so holiday-looking. Were they so many gay bonnets rising above the foliage? or were they flocks of white doves with purple-stained breasts just lifting up their wings to take flight? or were they little fleets of fairy boats, with sail set, tossing on a mimic sea of wild, weedy growths? Such images throng the mind on recalling the scene, and only faintly hint its beauty and animation. The long, erect, white sepals do much to give the alert, tossing look which the flower wears. The dim light, too, of its secluded haunts, and its snowy purity and freshness, contribute to the impression it makes. The purple tinge is like a stain of wine which has slightly overflowed the brim of the inflated lip or sac and run part way down its snowy sides.

This lady's-slipper is one of the rarest and choicest of our wild flowers, and its haunts and its beauty are known only to the few. Those who have the secret guard it closely, lest their favorite be exterminated. A well-known botanist in one of the large New England cities told me that it was found in but one place in that

neighborhood, and that the secret, so far as he knew, was known to but three persons, and was carefully kept by them.

A friend of mine, an enthusiast on orchids, came one June day a long way by rail to see this flower. I conducted him to the edge of the swamp, lifted up the branches as I would a curtain, and said, "There they are."

"Where?" said he, peering far into the dim recesses.

"Within six feet of you," I replied.

He narrowed his vision, and such an expression of surprise and delight as came over his face! A group of a dozen or more of the plants, some of them twin-flowered, were there almost within reach, the first he had ever seen, and his appreciation of the scene, visible in every look and gesture, was greatly satisfying. In the fall he came and moved a few of the plants to a tamarack swamp in his own vicinity, where they thrived and bloomed finely for a few years, and then for some unknown reason failed.

Nearly every June, my friend still comes to feast his eyes upon this queen of the cypripediums.

While returning from my first search for the lady's-slipper, my hat fairly brushed the nest of the red-eyed vireo, which was so cunningly concealed, such an open secret, in the dim, leafless underwoods, that I could but pause and regard it. It was suspended from the end of a small, curving sapling; was flecked here and there by some whitish substance, so as to blend it with the gray mottled boles of the trees; and, in the dimly lighted ground-floor of the woods, was sure to escape any but the most

prolonged scrutiny. A couple of large leaves formed a canopy above it. It was not so much hidden as it was rendered invisible by texture and position with reference to light and shade.

A few summers ago I struck a new and beautiful plant in the shape of a weed that had only recently appeared in that part of the country. I was walking through an August meadow when I saw, on a little knoll, a bit of most vivid orange, verging on a crimson. I knew of no flower of such a complexion frequenting such a place as that. On investigation, it proved to be a stranger. It had a rough, hairy, leafless stem about a foot high, surmounted by a corymbose cluster of flowers or flower-heads of dark vivid orange-color. The leaves were deeply notched and toothed, very bristly, and were pressed flat to the ground. The whole plant was a veritable Esau for hairs, and it seemed to lay hold upon the ground as if it was not going to let go easily. And what a fiery plume it had! The next day, in another field a mile away, I chanced upon more of the flowers. On making inquiry, I found that a small patch or colony of the plants had appeared that season, or first been noticed then, in a meadow well known to me from boyhood. They had been cut down with the grass in early July, and the first week in August had shot up and bloomed again. I found the spot aflame with them. Their leaves covered every inch of the surface where they stood, and not a spear of grass grew there. They were taking slow but complete possession; they were devouring the meadow by inches. The plant seemed to be a species of hieracium, or hawkweed, or some closely allied

species of the composite family, but I could not find it mentioned in our botanies.

A few days later, on the edge of an adjoining county ten miles distant, I found, probably, its headquarters. It had appeared there a few years before, and was thought to have escaped from some farmer's door-yard. Patches of it were appearing here and there in the fields, and the farmers were thoroughly alive to the danger, and were fighting it like fire. Its seeds are winged like those of the dandelion, and it sows itself far and near. It would be a beautiful acquisition to our midsummer fields, supplying a tint as brilliant as that given by the scarlet poppies to English grain-fields. But it would be an expensive one, as it usurps the land completely.²

Parts of New England have already a midsummer flower nearly as brilliant, and probably far less aggressive and noxious, in meadow-beauty, or rhexia, the sole northern genus of a family of tropical plants. I found it very abundant in August in the country bordering on Buzzard's Bay. It was a new flower to me, and I was puzzled to make it out. It seemed like some sort of scarlet evening primrose. The parts were in fours, the petals slightly heart-shaped and convoluted in the bud, the leaves bristly, the calyx-tube prolonged, etc.; but the stem was square, the leaves opposite, and the tube urn-shaped. The flowers were an inch across, and bright purple. It grew in large patches in dry,

² This observation was made ten years ago. I have since learned that the plant is *Hieracium aurantiacum* from Europe, a kind of hawkweed. It is fast becoming a common weed in New York and New England. (1894.)

sandy fields, making the desert gay with color; and also on the edges of marshy places. It eclipses any flower of the open fields known to me farther inland. When we come to improve our wild garden, as recommended by Mr. Robinson in his book on wild gardening, we must not forget the rhexia.

Our seacoast flowers are probably more brilliant in color than the same flowers in the interior. I thought the wild rose on the Massachusetts coast deeper tinted and more fragrant than those I was used to. The steeple-bush, or hardhack, had more color, as had the rose gerardia and several other plants.

But when vivid color is wanted, what can surpass or equal our cardinal-flower? There is a glow about this flower as if color emanated from it as from a live coal. The eye is baffled, and does not seem to reach the surface of the petal; it does not see the texture or material part as it does in other flowers, but rests in a steady, still radiance. It is not so much something colored as it is color itself. And then the moist, cool, shady places it affects, usually where it has no floral rivals, and where the large, dark shadows need just such a dab of fire! Often, too, we see it double, its reflected image in some dark pool heightening its effect. I have never found it with its only rival in color, the monarda or bee-balm, a species of mint. Farther north, the cardinal-flower seems to fail, and the monarda takes its place, growing in similar localities. One may see it about a mountain spring, or along a meadow brook, or glowing in the shade around the head of a wild mountain lake. It stands up two feet high or more, and the

flowers show like a broad scarlet cap.

The only thing I have seen in this country that calls to mind the green grain-fields of Britain splashed with scarlet poppies may be witnessed in August in the marshes of the lower Hudson, when the broad sedgy and flaggy spaces are sprinkled with the great marsh-mallow. It is a most pleasing spectacle, – level stretches of dark green flag or waving marsh-grass kindled on every square yard by these bright pink blossoms, like great burning coals fanned in the breeze. The mallow is not so deeply colored as the poppy, but it is much larger, and has the tint of youth and happiness. It is an immigrant from Europe, but it is making itself thoroughly at home in our great river meadows.

The same day your eye is attracted by the mallows, as your train skirts or cuts through the broad marshes, it will revel with delight in the masses of fresh bright color afforded by the purple loosestrife, which grows in similar localities, and shows here and there like purple bonfires. It is a tall plant, grows in dense masses, and affords a most striking border to the broad spaces dotted with the mallow. It, too, came to us from over seas, and first appeared along the Wallkill, many years ago. It used to be thought by the farmers in that vicinity that its seed was first brought in wool imported to this country from Australia, and washed in the Wallkill at Walden, where there was a woolen factory. This is not probable, as it is a European species, and I should sooner think it had escaped from cultivation. If one were to act upon the suggestions of Robinson's "Wild Garden," already alluded to,

he would gather the seeds of these plants and sow them in the marshes and along the sluggish inland streams, till the banks of all our rivers were gay with these brilliant exotics.

Among our native plants, the one that takes broad marshes to itself and presents vast sheets of color is the marsh milkweed, far less brilliant than the loosestrife or the mallow, still a missionary in the wilderness, lighting up many waste places with its humbler tints of purple.

One sometimes seems to discover a familiar wild flower anew by coming upon it in some peculiar and striking situation. Our columbine is at all times and in all places one of the most exquisitely beautiful of flowers; yet one spring day, when I saw it growing out of a small seam on the face of a great lichen-covered wall of rock, where no soil or mould was visible, – a jet of foliage and color shooting out of a black line on the face of a perpendicular mountain wall and rising up like a tiny fountain, its drops turning to flame-colored jewels that hung and danced in the air against the gray rocky surface, – its beauty became something magical and audacious. On little narrow shelves in the rocky wall the corydalis was blooming, and among the loose boulders at its base the blood-root shone conspicuous, suggesting snow rather than anything more sanguine.

Certain flowers one makes special expeditions for every season. They are limited in their ranges, and must generally be sought for in particular haunts. How many excursions to the woods does the delicious trailing arbutus give rise to! How can

one let the spring go by without gathering it himself when it hides in the moss! There are arbutus days in one's calendar, days when the trailing flower fairly calls him to the woods. With me, they come the latter part of April. The grass is greening here and there on the moist slopes and by the spring runs; the first furrow has been struck by the farmer; the liver-leaf is in the height of its beauty, and the bright constellations of the blood-root shine out here and there; one has had his first taste and his second taste of the spring and of the woods, and his tongue is sharpened rather than cloyed. Now he will take the most delicious and satisfying draught of all, the very essence and soul of the early season, of the tender brooding days, with all their prophecies and awakenings, in the handful of trailing arbutus which he gathers in his walk. At the mere thought of it, one sees the sunlight flooding the woods, smells the warm earthy odors which the heat liberates from beneath the dry leaves, hears the mellow bass of the first bumblebee,

"Rover of the underwoods,"

or the finer chord of the adventurous honey-bee seeking store for his empty comb. The arriving swallows twitter above the woods; the first chewink rustles the dry leaves; the northward-bound thrushes, the hermit and the gray-cheeked, flit here and there before you. The robin, the sparrow, and the bluebird are building their first nests, and the first shad are making their

way slowly up the Hudson. Indeed, the season is fairly under way when the trailing arbutus comes. Now look out for troops of boys and girls going to the woods to gather it! and let them look out that in their greed they do not exterminate it. Within reach of our large towns, the choicer spring wild flowers are hunted mercilessly. Every fresh party from town raids them as if bent upon their destruction. One day, about ten miles from one of our Hudson River cities, there got into the train six young women loaded down with vast sheaves and bundles of trailing arbutus. Each one of them had enough for forty. They had apparently made a clean sweep of the woods. It was a pretty sight, – the pink and white of the girls and the pink and white of the flowers! and the car, too, was suddenly filled with perfume, – the breath of spring loaded the air; but I thought it a pity to ravish the woods in that way. The next party was probably equally greedy, and, because a handful was desirable, thought an armful proportionately so; till, by and by, the flower will be driven from those woods.

Another flower that one makes special excursions for is the pond-lily. The pond-lily is a star, and easily takes the first place among lilies; and the expeditions to her haunts, and the gathering her where she rocks upon the dark secluded waters of some pool or lakelet, are the crown and summit of the floral expeditions of summer. It is the expedition about which more things gather than almost any other: you want your boat, you want your lunch, you want your friend or friends with you. You are going to put in

the greater part of the day; you are going to picnic in the woods, and indulge in a "green thought in a green shade." When my friend and I go for pond-lilies, we have to traverse a distance of three miles with our boat in a wagon. The road is what is called a "back road," and leads through woods most of the way. Black Pond, where the lilies grow, lies about one hundred feet higher than the Hudson, from which it is separated by a range of rather bold wooded heights, one of which might well be called Mount Hymettus, for I have found a great deal of wild honey in the forest that covers it. The stream which flows out of the pond takes a northward course for two or three miles, till it finds an opening through the rocky hills, when it makes rapidly for the Hudson. Its career all the way from the lake is a series of alternating pools and cascades. Now a long, deep, level stretch, where the perch and the bass and the pickerel lurk, and where the willow-herb and the royal osmunda fern line the shores; then a sudden leap of eight, ten, or fifteen feet down rocks to another level stretch, where the water again loiters and suns itself; and so on through its adventurous course till the hills are cleared and the river is in sight. Our road leads us along this stream, across its rude bridges, through dark hemlock and pine woods, under gray, rocky walls, now past a black pool, then within sight or hearing of a foaming rapid or fall, till we strike the outlet of the long level that leads to the lake. In this we launch our boat and paddle slowly upward over its dark surface, now pushing our way through half-submerged treetops, then ducking under the

trunk of an overturned tree which bridges the stream and makes a convenient way for the squirrels and wood-mice, or else forcing the boat over it when it is sunk a few inches below the surface. We are traversing what was once a continuation of the lake; the forest floor is as level as the water and but a few inches above it, even in summer; it sweeps back a half mile or more, densely covered with black ash, red maple, and other deciduous trees, to the foot of the rocky hills which shut us in. What glimpses we get, as we steal along, into the heart of the rank, dense, silent woods! I carry in my eye yet the vision I had, on one occasion, of a solitary meadow lily hanging like a fairy bell there at the end of a chance opening, where a ray of sunlight fell full upon it, and brought out its brilliant orange against the dark green background. It appeared to be the only bit of bright color in all the woods. Then the song of a single hermit thrush immediately after did even more for the ear than the lily did for the eye. Presently the swamp sparrow, one of the rarest of the sparrows, was seen and heard; and that nest there in a small bough a few feet over the water proves to be hers, – in appearance a ground-bird's nest in a bough, with the same four speckled eggs. As we come in sight of the lilies, where they cover the water at the outlet of the lake, a brisk gust of wind, as if it had been waiting to surprise us, sweeps down and causes every leaf to leap from the water and show its pink under side. Was it a fluttering of hundreds of wings, or the clapping of a multitude of hands? But there rocked the lilies with their golden hearts open to the sun, and their tender white petals

as fresh as crystals of snow. What a queenly flower, indeed, the type of unsullied purity and sweetness! Its root, like a black, corrugated, ugly reptile, clinging to the slime, but its flower in purity and whiteness like a star. There is something very pretty in the closed bud making its way up through the water to meet the sun; and there is something touching in the flower closing itself up again after its brief career, and slowly burying itself beneath the dark wave. One almost fancies a sad, regretful look in it as the stem draws it downward to mature its seed on the sunless bottom. The pond-lily is a flower of the morning; it closes a little after noon; but after you have plucked it and carried it home, it still feels the call of the morning sun, and will open to him, if you give it a good chance. Coil their stems up in the grass on the lawn, where the sun's rays can reach them, and sprinkle them copiously. By the time you are ready for your morning walk, there they sit upon the moist grass, almost as charmingly as upon the wave.

Our more choice wild flowers, the rarer and finer spirits among them, please us by their individual beauty and charm; others, more coarse and common, delight us by mass and profusion; we regard not the one, but the many, as did Wordsworth his golden daffodils: —

"Ten thousand saw I at a glance
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance."

Of such is the marsh marigold, giving a golden lining to many

a dark, marshy place in the leafless April woods, or marking a little watercourse through a greening meadow with a broad line of new gold. One glances up from his walk, and his eye falls upon something like fixed and heaped-up sunshine there beneath the alders, or yonder in the freshening field.

In a measure, the same is true of our wild sunflowers, lighting up many a neglected bushy fence-corner or weedy roadside with their bright, beaming faces. The evening primrose is a coarse, rankly growing plant; but, in late summer, how many an untrimmed bank is painted over by it with the most fresh and delicate canary yellow!

We have one flower which grows in vast multitudes, yet which is exquisitely delicate and beautiful in and of itself: I mean the *houstonia*, or bluets. In May, in certain parts of the country, I see vast sheets of it; in old, low meadow bottoms that have never known the plow, it covers the ground like a dull bluish or purplish snow which has blown unevenly about. In the mass it is not especially pleasing; it has a faded, indefinite sort of look. Its color is not strong and positive enough to be effective in the mass, yet each single flower is a gem of itself. The color of the common violet is much more firm and pronounced; and how many a grassy bank is made gay with it in the mid-May days! We have a great variety of violets, and they are very capricious as to perfume. The only species which are uniformly fragrant are the tall Canada violet, so common in our northern woods, – white, with a tinge of purple to the under side of its petals, – and

the small white violet of the marshy places; yet one summer I came upon a host of the spurred violet in a sunny place in the woods which filled the air with a delicate perfume. A handful of them yielded a perceptible fragrance, but a single flower none that I could detect. The Canada violet very frequently blooms in the fall, and is more fragrant at such times than in its earlier blooming. I must not forget to mention that delicate and lovely flower of May, the fringed polygala. You gather it when you go for the fragrant, showy orchis, – that is, if you are lucky enough to find it. It is rather a shy flower, and is not found in every wood. One day we went up and down through the woods looking for it, – woods of mingled oak, chestnut, pine, and hemlock, – and were about giving it up when suddenly we came upon a gay company of them beside an old wood-road. It was as if a flock of small rose-purple butterflies had alighted there on the ground before us. The whole plant has a singularly fresh and tender aspect. Its foliage is of a slightly purple tinge, and of very delicate texture. Not the least interesting feature about the plant is the concealed fertile flower which it bears on a subterranean shoot, keeping, as it were, one flower for beauty and one for use.

II

In our walks we note the most showy and beautiful flowers, but not always the most interesting. Who, for instance, pauses to consider that early species of everlasting, commonly called

mouse-ear, that grows nearly everywhere by the roadside or about poor fields? It begins to be noticeable in May, its whitish downy appearance, its groups of slender stalks crowned with a corymb of paper-like buds, contrasting it with the fresh green of surrounding grass or weeds. It is a member of a very large family, the Compositæ, and does not attract one by its beauty; but it is interesting because of its many curious traits and habits. For instance, it is dioecious, that is, the two sexes are represented by separate plants; and, what is more curious, these plants are usually found separated from each other in well-defined groups, like the men and women in an old-fashioned country church, – always in groups; here a group of females, there, a few yards away, a group of males. The females may be known by their more slender and graceful appearance, and, as the season advances, by their outstripping the males in growth. Indeed, they become real amazons in comparison with their brothers. The staminate or male plants grow but a few inches high; the heads are round, and have a more dusky or freckled appearance than do the pistillate; and as soon as they have shed their pollen their work is done, they are of no further use, and by the middle of May, or before, their heads droop, their stalks wither, and their general collapse sets in. Then the other sex, or pistillate plants, seem to have taken a new lease of life; they wax strong, they shoot up with the growing grass and keep their heads above it; they are alert and active; they bend in the breeze; their long, tapering flower-heads take on a tinge of color, and life seems full of purpose and enjoyment with

them. I have discovered, too, that they are real sun-worshippers; that they turn their faces to the east in the morning, and follow the sun in his course across the sky till they all bend to the west at his going down. On the other hand, their brothers have stood stiff and stupid, and unresponsive to any influence of sky and air, so far as I could see, till they drooped and died.

Another curious thing is that the females seem vastly more numerous, – I should say almost ten times as abundant. You have to hunt for the males; the others you see far off. One season I used every day to pass several groups or circles of females in the grass by the roadside. I noted how they grew and turned their faces sunward. I observed how alert and vigorous they were, and what a purplish tinge came over their mammæ-shaped flower-heads as June approached. I looked for the males; to the east, south, west, none could be found for hundreds of yards. On the north, about two hundred feet away, I found a small colony of meek and lowly males. I wondered by what agency fertilization would take place, – by insects, or by the wind? I suspected it would not take place. No insects seemed to visit the flowers, and the wind surely could not be relied upon to hit the mark so far off, and from such an unlikely corner, too. But by some means the vitalizing dust seemed to have been conveyed. Early in June, the plants began to shed their down, or seed-bearing pappus, still carrying their heads at the top of the grass, so that the breezes could have free access to them, and sow the seeds far and wide.

As the seeds are sown broadcast by the wind, I was at first

puzzled to know how the two sexes were kept separate, and always in little communities, till I perceived, what I might have read in the botany, that the plant is perennial and spreads by offsets and runners, like the strawberry. This would of course keep the two kinds in groups by themselves.

Another plant which has interesting ways and is beautiful besides is the adder's-tongue, or yellow erythronium, the earliest of the lilies, and one of the most pleasing. The April sunshine is fairly reflected in its revolute flowers. The lilies have bulbs that sit on or near the top of the ground. The onion is a fair type of the lily in this respect. But here is a lily with the bulb deep in the ground. How it gets there is well worth investigating. The botany says that the bulb is deep in the ground, but offers no explanation. Now it is only the bulbs of the older or flowering plants that are deep in the ground. The bulbs of the young plants are near the top of the ground. The young plants have but one leaf, the older or flowering ones have two. If you happen to be in the woods at the right time in early April, you may see these leaves compactly rolled together, piercing the matted coating of sear leaves that cover the ground like some sharp-pointed instrument. They do not burst their covering or lift it up, but pierce through it like an awl.

But how does the old bulb get so deep into the ground? In digging some of them up one spring in an old meadow bottom, I had to cleave the tough fibrous sod to a depth of eight inches. The smaller ones were barely two inches below the surface. Of

course they all started from the seed at the surface of the soil. The young botanist, or nature-lover, will find here a field for original research. If, in late May or early June, after the leaves of the plant have disappeared, he finds the ground where they stood showing curious, looping, twisting growths or roots, of a greenish white color, let him examine them. They are as smooth and as large as an angle-worm, and very brittle. Both ends will be found in the ground, one attached to the old bulb, the other boring or drilling downward and enlarged till it suggests the new bulb. I do not know that this mother root in all cases comes to the surface. Why it should come at all is a mystery, unless it be in some way to get more power for the downward thrust. My own observations upon the subject are not complete, but I think in the foregoing I have given the clew as to how the bulb each year sinks deeper and deeper into the ground.

It is a pity that this graceful and abundant flower has no good and appropriate common name. It is the earliest of the true lilies, and it has all the grace and charm that belong to this order of flowers. *Erythronium*, its botanical name, is not good, as it is derived from a Greek word that means red, while one species of our flower is yellow and the other is white. How it came to be called adder's-tongue I do not know; probably from the spotted character of the leaf, which might suggest a snake, though it in no wise resembles a snake's tongue. A fawn is spotted, too, and "fawn-lily" would be better than adder's-tongue. Still better is the name "trout-lily," which has recently been proposed for

this plant. It blooms along the trout streams, and its leaf is as mottled as a trout's back. The name "dog's-tooth" may have been suggested by the shape and color of the bud, but how the "violet" came to be added is a puzzle, as it has not one feature of the violet. It is only another illustration of the haphazard way in which our wild flowers, as well as our birds, have been named.

In my spring rambles I have sometimes come upon a solitary specimen of this yellow lily growing beside a mossy stone where the sunshine fell full upon it, and have thought it one of the most beautiful of our wild flowers. Its two leaves stand up like a fawn's ears, and this feature, with its recurved petals, gives it an alert, wide-awake look. The white species I have never seen. I am told they are very abundant on the mountains in California.

Another of our common wild flowers, which I always look at with an interrogation-point in my mind, is the wild ginger. Why should this plant always hide its flower? Its two fuzzy, heart-shaped green leaves stand up very conspicuously amid the rocks or mossy stones; but its one curious, brown, bell-shaped flower is always hidden beneath the moss or dry leaves, as if too modest to face the light of the open woods. As a rule, the one thing which a plant is anxious to show and to make much of, and to flaunt before all the world, is its flower. But the wild ginger reverses the rule, and blooms in secret. Instead of turning upward toward the light and air, it turns downward toward the darkness and the silence. It has no corolla, but what the botanists call a lurid or brown-purple calyx, which is conspicuous like a corolla. Its root

leaves in the mouth a taste precisely like that of ginger.

This plant and the closed gentian are apparent exceptions, in their manner of blooming, to the general habit of the rest of our flowers. The closed gentian does not hide its flower, but the corolla never opens; it always remains a closed bud. I used to think that this gentian could never experience the benefits of insect visits, which Darwin showed us were of such importance in the vegetable world. I once plucked one of the flowers into which a bumblebee had forced his way, but he had never come out; the flower was his tomb.

I am assured, however, by recent observers, that the bumblebee does successfully enter the closed corolla, and thus distribute its pollen.³

There is yet another curious exception which I will mention, namely, the witch-hazel. All our trees and plants bloom in the spring, except this one species; this blooms in the fall. Just as its leaves are fading and falling, its flowers appear, giving out an odor along the bushy lanes and margins of the woods that is to the nose like cool water to the hand. Why it should bloom in the fall instead of in the spring is a mystery. And it is probably because

³ "A bumblebee came along and lit upon a cluster of asters. Leaving these, it next visited a head of gentians, and with some difficulty thrust its tongue through the valves of the nearest blossom; then it pushed in its head and body until only the hind legs and the tip of the abdomen were sticking out. In this position it made the circuit of the blossom, and then emerged, resting a moment to brush the pollen from its head and thorax into the pollen-baskets, before flying again to a neighboring aster. The whole process required about twenty seconds." *Ten New England Blossoms and their Insect Visitors*, Clarence Moores Weed, pp. 93, 94.

of this very curious trait that its branches are used as divining-rods, by certain credulous persons, to point out where springs of water and precious metals are hidden.

Most young people find botany a dull study. So it is, as taught from the text-books in the schools; but study it yourself in the fields and woods, and you will find it a source of perennial delight. Find your flower, and then name it by the aid of the botany. There is so much in a name. To find out what a thing is called is a great help. It is the beginning of knowledge; it is the first step. When we see a new person who interests us, we wish to know his or her name. A bird, a flower, a place, – the first thing we wish to know about it is its name. Its name helps us to classify it; it gives us a handle to grasp it by; it sheds a ray of light where all before was darkness. As soon as we know the name of a thing, we seem to have established some sort of relation with it.

The other day, while the train was delayed by an accident, I wandered a few yards away from it along the river margin seeking wild flowers. Should I find any whose name I did not know? While thus loitering, a young English girl also left the train and came in my direction, plucking the flowers right and left as she came. But they were all unknown to her; she did not know the name of one of them, and she wished to send them home to her father, too. With what satisfaction she heard the names! The words seemed to be full of meaning to her, though she had never heard them before in her life. It was what she wanted: it was an introduction to the flowers, and her interest in them increased

at once.

"That orange-colored flower which you just plucked from the edge of the water, – that is our jewel-weed," I said.

"It looks like a jewel," she replied.

"You have nothing like it in England, or did not have till lately, but I hear it is now appearing along certain English streams, having been brought from this country."

"And what is this?" she inquired, holding up a blue flower with a very bristly leaf and stalk.

"That is viper's bugloss, or blue-weed, a plant from your side of the water, one that is making itself thoroughly at home along the Hudson, and in the valleys of some of its tributaries among the Catskills. It is a rough, hardy weed, but its flower, with its long, conspicuous purple stamens and blue corolla, as you see, is very pretty."

"Here is another emigrant from across the Atlantic," I said, holding up a cluster of small white flowers, each mounted upon a little inflated brown bag or balloon, – the bladder campion. "It also runs riot in some of our fields, as I am sure you will not see it at home." She went on filling her hands with flowers, and I gave her the names of each, – sweet clover or melilotus, a foreign plant; vervain (foreign); purple loosestrife (foreign); toad-flax (foreign); chelone, or turtle-head, a native; and the purple mimulus, or monkey-flower, also a native. It was a likely place for the cardinal-flower, but I could not find any. I wanted this hearty English girl to see one of our native wild flowers so intense

in color that it would fairly make her eyes water to gaze upon it.

Just then the whistle of the engine summoned us all aboard, and in a moment we were off.

When one is stranded anywhere in the country in the season of flowers or birds, if he feels any interest in these things he always has something ready at hand to fall back upon. And if he feels no interest in them he will do well to cultivate an interest. The tedium of an eighty-mile drive which I lately took (in September), cutting through parts of three counties, was greatly relieved by noting the various flowers by the roadside. First my attention was attracted by wild thyme making purple patches here and there in the meadows and pastures. I got out of the wagon and gathered some of it. I found honey-bees working upon it, and remembered that it was a famous plant for honey in parts of the Old World. It had probably escaped from some garden; I had never seen it growing wild in this way before. Along the Schoharie Kill, I saw acres of blue-weed, or viper's bugloss, the hairy stems of the plants, when looked at toward the sun, having a frosted appearance.

What is this tall plant by the roadside, thickly hung with pendent clusters of long purplish buds or tassels? The stalk is four feet high, the lower leaves are large and lobed, and the whole effect of the plant is striking. The clusters of purple pendants have a very decorative effect. This is a species of *nabalus*, of the great composite family, and is sometimes called lion's-foot. The flower is cream-colored, but quite inconspicuous. The noticeable

thing about it is the drooping or pendulous clusters of what appear to be buds, but which are the involucre, bundles of purple scales, like little staves, out of which the flower emerges.

In another place I caught sight of something intensely blue in a wet, weedy place, and, on getting some of it, found it to be the closed gentian, a flower to which I have already referred as never opening, but always remaining a bud. Four or five of these blue buds, each like the end of your little finger and as long as the first joint, crown the top of the stalk, set in a rosette of green leaves. It is one of our rarer flowers, and a very interesting one, well worth getting out of the wagon to gather. As I drove through a swampy part of Ulster County, my attention was attracted by a climbing plant overrunning the low bushes by the sluggish streams, and covering them thickly with clusters of dull white flowers. I did not remember ever to have seen it before, and, on taking it home and examining it, found it to be climbing boneset. The flowers are so much like those of boneset that you would suspect their relationship at once.

Without the name, any flower is still more or less a stranger to you. The name betrays its family, its relationship to other flowers, and gives the mind something tangible to grasp. It is very difficult for persons who have had no special training to learn the names of the flowers from the botany. The botany is a sealed book to them. The descriptions of the flowers are in a language which they do not understand at all. And the key is no help to them. It is as much a puzzle as the botany itself. They need a key to

unlock the key.

One of these days some one will give us a handbook of our wild flowers, by the aid of which we shall all be able to name those we gather in our walks without the trouble of analyzing them. In this book we shall have a list of all our flowers arranged according to color, as white flowers, blue flowers, yellow flowers, pink flowers, etc., with place of growth and time of blooming; also lists or sub-lists of fragrant flowers, climbing flowers, marsh flowers, meadow flowers, wood flowers, etc., so that, with flower in hand, by running over these lists we shall be pretty sure to find its name. Having got its name, we can turn to Gray or Wood and find a more technical description of it if we choose.

II

THE HEART OF THE SOUTHERN CATSKILLS

On looking at the southern and more distant Catskills from the Hudson River on the east, or on looking at them from the west from some point of vantage in Delaware County, you see, amid the group of mountains, one that looks like the back and shoulders of a gigantic horse. The horse has got his head down grazing; the shoulders are high, and the descent from them down his neck very steep; if he were to lift up his head, one sees that it would be carried far above all other peaks, and that the noble beast might gaze straight to his peers in the Adirondacks or the White Mountains. But the head and neck never come up; some spell or enchantment keeps it down there amid the mighty herd; and the high round shoulders and the smooth strong back of the steed are alone visible. The peak to which I refer is Slide Mountain, the highest of the Catskills by some two hundred feet, and probably the most inaccessible; certainly the hardest to get a view of, it is hedged about so completely by other peaks, – the greatest mountain of them all, and apparently the least willing to be seen; only at a distance of thirty or forty miles is it seen to stand up above all other peaks. It takes its name from a landslide which occurred many years ago down its steep northern side, or

down the neck of the grazing steed. The mane of spruce and balsam fir was stripped away for many hundred feet, leaving a long gray streak visible from afar.

Slide Mountain is the centre and the chief of the southern Catskills. Streams flow from its base, and from the base of its subordinates, to all points of the compass, – the Rondout and the Neversink to the south; the Beaverkill to the west; the Esopus to the north; and several lesser streams to the east. With its summit as the centre, a radius of ten miles would include within the circle described but very little cultivated land; only a few poor, wild farms in some of the numerous valleys. The soil is poor, a mixture of gravel and clay, and is subject to slides. It lies in the valleys in ridges and small hillocks, as if dumped there from a huge cart. The tops of the southern Catskills are all capped with a kind of conglomerate, or "pudden stone," – a rock of cemented quartz pebbles which underlies the coal measures. This rock disintegrates under the action of the elements, and the sand and gravel which result are carried into the valleys and make up the most of the soil. From the northern Catskills, so far as I know them, this rock has been swept clean. Low down in the valleys the old red sandstone crops out, and, as you go west into Delaware County, in many places it alone remains and makes up most of the soil, all the superincumbent rock having been carried away.

Slide Mountain had been a summons and a challenge to me for many years. I had fished every stream that it nourished, and had camped in the wilderness on all sides of it, and whenever I had

caught a glimpse of its summit I had promised myself to set foot there before another season had passed. But the seasons came and went, and my feet got no nimbler, and Slide Mountain no lower, until finally, one July, seconded by an energetic friend, we thought to bring Slide to terms by approaching him through the mountains on the east. With a farmer's son for guide we struck in by way of Weaver Hollow, and, after a long and desperate climb, contented ourselves with the Wittenberg, instead of Slide. The view from the Wittenberg is in many respects more striking, as you are perched immediately above a broader and more distant sweep of country, and are only about two hundred feet lower. You are here on the eastern brink of the southern Catskills, and the earth falls away at your feet and curves down through an immense stretch of forest till it joins the plain of Shokan, and thence sweeps away to the Hudson and beyond. Slide is southwest of you, six or seven miles distant, but is visible only when you climb into a treetop. I climbed and saluted him, and promised to call next time.

We passed the night on the Wittenberg, sleeping on the moss, between two decayed logs, with balsam boughs thrust into the ground and meeting and forming a canopy over us. In coming off the mountain in the morning we ran upon a huge porcupine, and I learned for the first time that the tail of a porcupine goes with a spring like a trap. It seems to be a set-lock; and you no sooner touch with the weight of a hair one of the quills, than the tail leaps up in a most surprising manner, and the laugh is

not on your side. The beast cantered along the path in my front, and I threw myself upon him, shielded by my roll of blankets. He submitted quietly to the indignity, and lay very still under my blankets, with his broad tail pressed close to the ground. This I proceeded to investigate, but had not fairly made a beginning when it went off like a trap, and my hand and wrist were full of quills. This caused me to let up on the creature, when it lumbered away till it tumbled down a precipice. The quills were quickly removed from my hand, when we gave chase. When we came up to him, he had wedged himself in between the rocks so that he presented only a back bristling with quills, with the tail lying in ambush below. He had chosen his position well, and seemed to defy us. After amusing ourselves by repeatedly springing his tail and receiving the quills in a rotten stick, we made a slip-noose out of a spruce root, and, after much manœuvring, got it over his head and led him forth. In what a peevish, injured tone the creature did complain of our unfair tactics! He protested and protested, and whimpered and scolded like some infirm old man tormented by boys. His game after we led him forth was to keep himself as much as possible in the shape of a ball, but with two sticks and the cord we finally threw him over on his back and exposed his quill-less and vulnerable under side, when he fairly surrendered and seemed to say, "Now you may do with me as you like." His great chisel-like teeth, which are quite as formidable as those of the woodchuck, he does not appear to use at all in his defense, but relies entirely upon his quills, and when those fail

him he is done for.

After amusing ourselves with him awhile longer, we released him and went on our way. The trail to which we had committed ourselves led us down into Woodland Valley, a retreat which so took my eye by its fine trout brook, its superb mountain scenery, and its sweet seclusion, that I marked it for my own, and promised myself a return to it at no distant day. This promise I kept, and pitched my tent there twice during that season. Both occasions were a sort of laying siege to Slide, but we only skirmished with him at a distance; the actual assault was not undertaken. But the following year, reinforced by two other brave climbers, we determined upon the assault, and upon making it from this the most difficult side. The regular way is by Big Ingin Valley, where the climb is comparatively easy, and where it is often made by women. But from Woodland Valley only men may essay the ascent. Larkins is the upper inhabitant, and from our camping-ground near his clearing we set out early one June morning.

One would think nothing could be easier to find than a big mountain, especially when one is encamped upon a stream which he knows springs out of its very loins. But for some reason or other we had got an idea that Slide Mountain was a very slippery customer and must be approached cautiously. We had tried from several points in the valley to get a view of it, but were not quite sure we had seen its very head. When on the Wittenberg, a neighboring peak, the year before, I had caught a brief glimpse of

it only by climbing a dead tree and craning up for a moment from its topmost branch. It would seem as if the mountain had taken every precaution to shut itself off from a near view. It was a shy mountain, and we were about to stalk it through six or seven miles of primitive woods, and we seemed to have some unreasonable fear that it might elude us. We had been told of parties who had essayed the ascent from this side, and had returned baffled and bewildered. In a tangle of primitive woods, the very bigness of the mountain baffles one. It is all mountain; whichever way you turn – and one turns sometimes in such cases before he knows it – the foot finds a steep and rugged ascent.

The eye is of little service; one must be sure of his bearings and push boldly on and up. One is not unlike a flea upon a great shaggy beast, looking for the animal's head; or even like a much smaller and much less nimble creature, – he may waste his time and steps, and think he has reached the head when he is only upon the rump. Hence I questioned our host, who had several times made the ascent, closely. Larkins laid his old felt hat upon the table, and, placing one hand upon one side and the other upon the other, said: "There Slide lies, between the two forks of the stream, just as my hat lies between my two hands. David will go with you to the forks, and then you will push right on up." But Larkins was not right, though he had traversed all those mountains many times over. The peak we were about to set out for did not lie between the forks, but exactly at the head of one of them; the beginnings of the stream are in the very path of

the slide, as we afterward found. We broke camp early in the morning, and with our blankets strapped to our backs and rations in our pockets for two days, set out along an ancient and in places an obliterated bark road that followed and crossed and recrossed the stream. The morning was bright and warm, but the wind was fitful and petulant, and I predicted rain. What a forest solitude our obstructed and dilapidated wood-road led us through! five miles of primitive woods before we came to the forks, three miles before we came to the "burnt shanty," a name merely, — no shanty there now for twenty-five years past. The ravages of the bark-peelers were still visible, now in a space thickly strewn with the soft and decayed trunks of hemlock-trees, and overgrown with wild cherry, then in huge mossy logs scattered through the beech and maple woods; some of these logs were so soft and mossy that one could sit or recline upon them as upon a sofa.

But the prettiest thing was the stream soliloquizing in such musical tones there amid the moss-covered rocks and boulders. How clean it looked, what purity! Civilization corrupts the streams as it corrupts the Indian; only in such remote woods can you now see a brook in all its original freshness and beauty. Only the sea and the mountain forest brook are pure; all between is contaminated more or less by the work of man. An ideal trout brook was this, now hurrying, now loitering, now deepening around a great boulder, now gliding evenly over a pavement of green-gray stone and pebbles; no sediment or stain of any kind, but white and sparkling as snow-water, and nearly as cool.

Indeed, the water of all this Catskill region is the best in the world. For the first few days, one feels as if he could almost live on the water alone; he cannot drink enough of it. In this particular it is indeed the good Bible land, "a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills."

Near the forks we caught, or thought we caught, through an opening, a glimpse of Slide. Was it Slide? was it the head, or the rump, or the shoulder of the shaggy monster we were in quest of? At the forks there was a bewildering maze of underbrush and great trees, and the way did not seem at all certain; nor was David, who was then at the end of his reckoning, able to reassure us. But in assaulting a mountain, as in assaulting a fort, boldness is the watchword. We pressed forward, following a line of blazed trees for nearly a mile, then, turning to the left, began the ascent of the mountain. It was steep, hard climbing. We saw numerous marks of both bears and deer; but no birds, save at long intervals the winter wren flitting here and there, and darting under logs and rubbish like a mouse. Occasionally its gushing, lyrical song would break the silence. After we had climbed an hour or two, the clouds began to gather, and presently the rain began to come down. This was discouraging; but we put our backs up against trees and rocks, and waited for the shower to pass.

"They were wet with the showers of the mountain, and embraced the rocks for want of shelter," as they did in Job's time. But the shower was light and brief, and we were soon under way again. Three hours from the forks brought us out on the broad

level back of the mountain upon which Slide, considered as an isolated peak, is reared. After a time we entered a dense growth of spruce which covered a slight depression in the table of the mountain. The moss was deep, the ground spongy, the light dim, the air hushed. The transition from the open, leafy woods to this dim, silent, weird grove was very marked. It was like the passage from the street into the temple. Here we paused awhile and ate our lunch, and refreshed ourselves with water gathered from a little well sunk in the moss.

The quiet and repose of this spruce grove proved to be the calm that goes before the storm. As we passed out of it, we came plump upon the almost perpendicular battlements of Slide. The mountain rose like a huge, rock-bound fortress from this plain-like expanse. It was ledge upon ledge, precipice upon precipice, up which and over which we made our way slowly and with great labor, now pulling ourselves up by our hands, then cautiously finding niches for our feet and zigzagging right and left from shelf to shelf. This northern side of the mountain was thickly covered with moss and lichens, like the north side of a tree. This made it soft to the foot, and broke many a slip and fall. Everywhere a stunted growth of yellow birch, mountain-ash, and spruce and fir opposed our progress. The ascent at such an angle with a roll of blankets on your back is not unlike climbing a tree: every limb resists your progress and pushes you back; so that when we at last reached the summit, after twelve or fifteen hundred feet of this sort of work, the fight was about all out of the best of us. It was

then nearly two o'clock, so that we had been about seven hours in coming seven miles.

Here on the top of the mountain we overtook spring, which had been gone from the valley nearly a month. Red clover was opening in the valley below, and wild strawberries just ripening, on the summit the yellow birch was just hanging out its catkins, and the claytonia, or spring-beauty, was in bloom. The leaf-buds of the trees were just bursting, making a faint mist of green, which, as the eye swept downward, gradually deepened until it became a dense, massive cloud in the valleys. At the foot of the mountain the clintonia, or northern green lily, and the low shad-bush were showing their berries, but long before the top was reached they were found in bloom. I had never before stood amid blooming claytonia, a flower of April, and looked down upon a field that held ripening strawberries. Every thousand feet elevation seemed to make about ten days' difference in the vegetation, so that the season was a month or more later on the top of the mountain than at its base. A very pretty flower which we began to meet with well up on the mountain-side was the painted trillium, the petals white, veined with pink.

The low, stunted growth of spruce and fir which clothes the top of Slide has been cut away over a small space on the highest point, laying open the view on nearly all sides. Here we sat down and enjoyed our triumph. We saw the world as the hawk or the balloonist sees it when he is three thousand feet in the air. How soft and flowing all the outlines of the hills and mountains

beneath us looked! The forests dropped down and undulated away over them, covering them like a carpet. To the east we looked over the near-by Wittenberg range to the Hudson and beyond; to the south, Peak-o'-Moose, with its sharp crest, and Table Mountain, with its long level top, were the two conspicuous objects; in the west, Mt. Graham and Double Top, about three thousand eight hundred feet each, arrested the eye; while in our front to the north we looked over the top of Panther Mountain to the multitudinous peaks of the northern Catskills. All was mountain and forest on every hand. Civilization seemed to have done little more than to have scratched this rough, shaggy surface of the earth here and there. In any such view, the wild, the aboriginal, the geographical greatly predominate. The works of man dwindle, and the original features of the huge globe come out. Every single object or point is dwarfed; the valley of the Hudson is only a wrinkle in the earth's surface. You discover with a feeling of surprise that the great thing is the earth itself, which stretches away on every hand so far beyond your ken.

The Arabs believe that the mountains steady the earth and hold it together; but they had only to get on the top of a high one to see how insignificant they are, and how adequate the earth looks to get along without them. To the imaginative Oriental people, mountains seemed to mean much more than they do to us. They were sacred; they were the abodes of their divinities. They offered their sacrifices upon them. In the Bible, mountains are used as a symbol of that which is great and holy. Jerusalem

is spoken of as a holy mountain. The Syrians were beaten by the Children of Israel because, said they, "their gods are gods of the hills; therefore were they stronger than we." It was on Mount Horeb that God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and on Sinai that he delivered to him the law. Josephus says that the Hebrew shepherds never pasture their flocks on Sinai, believing it to be the abode of Jehovah. The solitude of mountain-tops is peculiarly impressive, and it is certainly easier to believe the Deity appeared in a burning bush there than in the valley below. When the clouds of heaven, too, come down and envelop the top of the mountain, – how such a circumstance must have impressed the old God-fearing Hebrews! Moses knew well how to surround the law with the pomp and circumstance that would inspire the deepest awe and reverence.

But when the clouds came down and enveloped us on Slide Mountain, the grandeur, the solemnity, were gone in a twinkling; the portentous-looking clouds proved to be nothing but base fog that wet us and extinguished the world for us. How tame, and prosy, and humdrum the scene instantly became! But when the fog lifted, and we looked from under it as from under a just-raised lid, and the eye plunged again like an escaped bird into those vast gulfs of space that opened at our feet, the feeling of grandeur and solemnity quickly came back.

The first want we felt on the top of Slide, after we had got some rest, was a want of water. Several of us cast about, right and left, but no sign of water was found. But water must be had, so we

all started off deliberately to hunt it up. We had not gone many hundred yards before we chanced upon an ice-cave beneath some rocks, – vast masses of ice, with crystal pools of water near. This was good luck, indeed, and put a new and brighter face on the situation.

Slide Mountain enjoys a distinction which no other mountain in the State, so far as is known, does, – it has a thrush peculiar to itself. This thrush was discovered and described by Eugene P. Bicknell, of New York, in 1880, and has been named Bicknell's thrush. A better name would have been Slide Mountain thrush, as the bird so far has only been found on the mountain.⁴ I did not see or hear it upon the Wittenberg, which is only a few miles distant, and only two hundred feet lower. In its appearance to the eye among the trees, one would not distinguish it from the gray-cheeked thrush of Baird, or the olive-backed thrush, but its song is totally different. The moment I heard it I said, "There is a new bird, a new thrush," as the quality of all thrush songs is the same. A moment more, and I knew it was Bicknell's thrush. The song is in a minor key, finer, more attenuated, and more under the breath than that of any other thrush. It seemed as if the bird was blowing in a delicate, slender, golden tube, so fine and yet so flute-like and resonant the song appeared. At times it was like a musical whisper of great sweetness and power. The birds were numerous about the summit, but we saw them nowhere else. No

⁴ Bicknell's thrush turns out to be the more southern form of the gray-cheeked thrush, and is found on the higher mountains of New York and New England.

other thrush was seen, though a few times during our stay I caught a mere echo of the hermit's song far down the mountain-side. A bird I was not prepared to see or hear was the black-poll warbler, a bird usually found much farther north, but here it was, amid the balsam firs, uttering its simple, lisping song.

The rocks on the tops of these mountains are quite sure to attract one's attention, even if he have no eye for such things. They are masses of light reddish conglomerate, composed of round wave-worn quartz pebbles. Every pebble had been shaped and polished upon some ancient seacoast, probably the Devonian. The rock disintegrates where it is most exposed to the weather, and forms a loose sandy and pebbly soil. These rocks form the floor of the coal formation, but in the Catskill region only the floor remains; the superstructure has never existed, or has been swept away; hence one would look for a coal mine here over his head in the air, rather than under his feet.

This rock did not have to climb up here as we did; the mountain stooped and took it upon its back in the bottom of the old seas, and then got lifted up again. This happened so long ago that the memory of the oldest inhabitant of these parts yields no clue to the time.

A pleasant task we had in reflooring and reroofing the log-hut with balsam boughs against the night. Plenty of small balsams grew all about, and we soon had a huge pile of their branches in the old hut. What a transformation, this fresh green carpet and our fragrant bed, like the deep-furred robe of some huge animal

wrought in that dingy interior! Two or three things disturbed our sleep. A cup of strong beef-tea taken for supper disturbed mine; then the porcupines kept up such a grunting and chattering near our heads, just on the other side of the log, that sleep was difficult. In my wakeful mood I was a good deal annoyed by a little rabbit that kept whipping in at our dilapidated door and nibbling at our bread and hardtack. He persisted even after the gray of the morning appeared. Then about four o'clock it began gently to rain. I think I heard the first drop that fell. My companions were all in sound sleep. The rain increased, and gradually the sleepers awoke. It was like the tread of an advancing enemy which every ear had been expecting. The roof over us was of the poorest, and we had no confidence in it. It was made of the thin bark of spruce and balsam, and was full of hollows and depressions. Presently these hollows got full of water, when there was a simultaneous downpour of bigger and lesser rills upon the sleepers beneath. Said sleepers, as one man, sprang up, each taking his blanket with him; but by the time some of the party had got themselves stowed away under the adjacent rock, the rain ceased. It was little more than the dissolving of the nightcap of fog which so often hangs about these heights. With the first appearance of the dawn I had heard the new thrush in the scattered trees near the hut, – a strain as fine as if blown upon a fairy flute, a suppressed musical whisper from out the tops of the dark spruces. Probably never did there go up from the top of a great mountain a smaller song to greet the day, albeit it was of

the purest harmony. It seemed to have in a more marked degree the quality of interior reverberation than any other thrush song I had ever heard. Would the altitude or the situation account for its minor key? Loudness would avail little in such a place. Sounds are not far heard on a mountain-top; they are lost in the abyss of vacant air. But amid these low, dense, dark spruces, which make a sort of canopied privacy of every square rod of ground, what could be more in keeping than this delicate musical whisper? It was but the soft hum of the balsams, interpreted and embodied in a bird's voice.

It was the plan of two of our companions to go from Slide over into the head of the Rondout, and thence out to the railroad at the little village of Shokan, an unknown way to them, involving nearly an all-day pull the first day through a pathless wilderness. We ascended to the topmost floor of the tower, and from my knowledge of the topography of the country I pointed out to them their course, and where the valley of the Rondout must lie. The vast stretch of woods, when it came into view from under the foot of Slide, seemed from our point of view very uniform. It swept away to the southeast, rising gently toward the ridge that separates Lone Mountain from Peak-o'-Moose, and presented a comparatively easy problem. As a clue to the course, the line where the dark belt or saddle-cloth of spruce, which covered the top of the ridge they were to skirt, ended, and the deciduous woods began, a sharp, well-defined line was pointed out as the course to be followed. It led straight to the top of the

broad level-backed ridge which connected two higher peaks, and immediately behind which lay the headwaters of the Rondout. Having studied the map thoroughly, and possessed themselves of the points, they rolled up their blankets about nine o'clock, and were off, my friend and myself purposing to spend yet another day and night on Slide. As our friends plunged down into that fearful abyss, we shouted to them the old classic caution, "Be bold, be bold, *be not too bold*." It required courage to make such a leap into the unknown, as I knew those young men were making, and it required prudence. A faint heart or a bewildered head, and serious consequences might have resulted. The theory of a thing is so much easier than the practice! The theory is in the air, the practice is in the woods; the eye, the thought, travel easily where the foot halts and stumbles. However, our friends made the theory and the fact coincide; they kept the dividing line between the spruce and the birches, and passed over the ridge into the valley safely; but they were torn and bruised and wet by the showers, and made the last few miles of their journey on will and pluck alone, their last pound of positive strength having been exhausted in making the descent through the chaos of rocks and logs into the head of the valley. In such emergencies one overdraws his account; he travels on the credit of the strength he expects to gain when he gets his dinner and some sleep. Unless one has made such a trip himself (and I have several times in my life), he can form but a faint idea what it is like, – what a trial it is to the body, and what a trial it is to the

mind. You are fighting a battle with an enemy in ambush. How those miles and leagues which your feet must compass lie hidden there in that wilderness; how they seem to multiply themselves; how they are fortified with logs, and rocks, and fallen trees; how they take refuge in deep gullies, and skulk behind unexpected eminences! Your body not only feels the fatigue of the battle, your mind feels the strain of the undertaking; you may miss your mark; the mountains may outmanœuvre you. All that day, whenever I looked upon that treacherous wilderness, I thought with misgivings of those two friends groping their way there, and would have given something to have known how it fared with them. Their concern was probably less than my own, because they were more ignorant of what was before them. Then there was just a slight shadow of a fear in my mind that I might have been in error about some points of the geography I had pointed out to them. But all was well, and the victory was won according to the campaign which I had planned. When we saluted our friends upon their own doorstep a week afterward, the wounds were nearly all healed and the rents all mended.

When one is on a mountain-top, he spends most of the time in looking at the show he has been at such pains to see. About every hour we would ascend the rude lookout to take a fresh observation. With a glass I could see my native hills forty miles away to the northwest. I was now upon the back of the horse, yea, upon the highest point of his shoulders, which had so many times attracted my attention as a boy. We could look along his balsam-

covered back to his rump, from which the eye glanced away down into the forests of the Neversink, and on the other hand plump down into the gulf where his head was grazing or drinking. During the day there was a grand procession of thunder-clouds filing along over the northern Catskills, and letting down veils of rain and enveloping them. From such an elevation one has the same view of the clouds that he does from the prairie or the ocean. They do not seem to rest across and to be upborne by the hills, but they emerge out of the dim west, thin and vague, and grow and stand up as they get nearer and roll by him, on a level but invisible highway, huge chariots of wind and storm.

In the afternoon a thick cloud threatened us, but it proved to be the condensation of vapor that announces a cold wave. There was soon a marked fall in the temperature, and as night drew near it became pretty certain that we were going to have a cold time of it. The wind rose, the vapor above us thickened and came nearer, until it began to drive across the summit in slender wraiths, which curled over the brink and shut out the view. We became very diligent in getting in our night wood, and in gathering more boughs to calk up the openings in the hut. The wood we scraped together was a sorry lot, roots and stumps and branches of decayed spruce, such as we could collect without an axe, and some rags and tags of birch bark. The fire was built in one corner of the shanty, the smoke finding easy egress through large openings on the east side and in the roof over it. We doubled up the bed, making it thicker and more nest-

like, and as darkness set in, stowed ourselves into it beneath our blankets. The searching wind found out every crevice about our heads and shoulders, and it was icy cold. Yet we fell asleep, and had slept about an hour when my companion sprang up in an unwonted state of excitement for so placid a man. His excitement was occasioned by the sudden discovery that what appeared to be a bar of ice was fast taking the place of his backbone. His teeth chattered, and he was convulsed with ague. I advised him to replenish the fire, and to wrap himself in his blanket and cut the liveliest capers he was capable of in so circumscribed a place. This he promptly did, and the thought of his wild and desperate dance there in the dim light, his tall form, his blanket flapping, his teeth chattering, the porcupines outside marking time with their squeals and grunts, still provokes a smile, though it was a serious enough matter at the time. After a while, the warmth came back to him, but he dared not trust himself again to the boughs; he fought the cold all night as one might fight a besieging foe. By carefully husbanding the fuel, the beleaguering enemy was kept at bay till morning came; but when morning did come, even the huge root he had used as a chair was consumed. Rolled in my blanket beneath a foot or more of balsam boughs, I had got some fairly good sleep, and was most of the time oblivious to the melancholy vigil of my friend. As we had but a few morsels of food left, and had been on rather short rations the day before, hunger was added to his other discomforts. At that time a letter was on the way to him from his wife, which

contained this prophetic sentence: "I hope thee is not suffering with cold and hunger on some lone mountain-top."

Mr. Bicknell's thrush struck up again at the first signs of dawn, notwithstanding the cold. I could hear his penetrating and melodious whisper as I lay buried beneath the boughs. Presently I arose and invited my friend to turn in for a brief nap, while I gathered some wood and set the coffee brewing. With a brisk, roaring fire on, I left for the spring to fetch some water, and to make my toilet. The leaves of the mountain goldenrod, which everywhere covered the ground in the opening, were covered with frozen particles of vapor, and the scene, shut in by fog, was chill and dreary enough.

We were now not long in squaring an account with Slide, and making ready to leave. Round pellets of snow began to fall, and we came off the mountain on the 10th of June in a November storm and temperature. Our purpose was to return by the same valley we had come. A well-defined trail led off the summit to the north; to this we committed ourselves. In a few minutes we emerged at the head of the slide that had given the mountain its name. This was the path made by visitors to the scene; when it ended, the track of the avalanche began; no bigger than your hand, apparently, had it been at first, but it rapidly grew, until it became several rods in width. It dropped down from our feet straight as an arrow until it was lost in the fog, and looked perilously steep. The dark forms of the spruce were clinging to the edge of it, as if reaching out to their fellows to save them. We

hesitated on the brink, but finally cautiously began the descent. The rock was quite naked and slippery, and only on the margin of the slide were there any boulders to stay the foot, or bushy growths to aid the hand. As we paused, after some minutes, to select our course, one of the finest surprises of the trip awaited us: the fog in our front was swiftly whirled up by the breeze, like the drop-curtain at the theatre, only much more rapidly, and in a twinkling the vast gulf opened before us. It was so sudden as to be almost bewildering. The world opened like a book, and there were the pictures; the spaces were without a film, the forests and mountains looked surprisingly near; in the heart of the northern Catskills a wild valley was seen flooded with sunlight. Then the curtain ran down again, and nothing was left but the gray strip of rock to which we clung, plunging down into the obscurity. Down and down we made our way. Then the fog lifted again. It was Jack and his beanstalk renewed; new wonders, new views, awaited us every few moments, till at last the whole valley below us stood in the clear sunshine. We passed down a precipice, and there was a rill of water, the beginning of the creek that wound through the valley below; farther on, in a deep depression, lay the remains of an old snow-bank; Winter had made his last stand here, and April flowers were springing up almost amid his very bones. We did not find a palace, and a hungry giant, and a princess, etc., at the end of our beanstalk, but we found a humble roof and the hospitable heart of Mrs. Larkins, which answered our purpose better. And we were in the mood, too, to have undertaken an

eating bout with any giant Jack ever discovered.

Of all the retreats I have found amid the Catskills, there is no other that possesses quite so many charms for me as this valley, wherein stands Larkins's humble dwelling; it is so wild, so quiet, and has such superb mountain views. In coming up the valley, you have apparently reached the head of civilization a mile or more lower down; here the rude little houses end, and you turn to the left into the woods. Presently you emerge into a clearing again, and before you rises the rugged and indented crest of Panther Mountain, and near at hand, on a low plateau, rises the humble roof of Larkins, – you get a picture of the Panther and of the homestead at one glance. Above the house hangs a high, bold cliff covered with forest, with a broad fringe of blackened and blasted tree-trunks, where the cackling of the great pileated woodpecker may be heard; on the left a dense forest sweeps up to the sharp spruce-covered cone of the Wittenberg, nearly four thousand feet high, while at the head of the valley rises Slide over all. From a meadow just back of Larkins's barn, a view may be had of all these mountains, while the terraced side of Cross Mountain bounds the view immediately to the east. Running from the top of Panther toward Slide one sees a gigantic wall of rock, crowned with a dark line of fir. The forest abruptly ends, and in its stead rises the face of this colossal rocky escarpment, like some barrier built by the mountain gods. Eagles might nest here. It breaks the monotony of the world of woods very impressively.

I delight in sitting on a rock in one of these upper fields, and

seeing the sun go down behind Panther. The rapid-flowing brook below me fills all the valley with a soft murmur. There is no breeze, but the great atmospheric tide flows slowly in toward the cooling forest; one can see it by the motes in the air illuminated by the setting sun: presently, as the air cools a little, the tide turns and flows slowly out. The long, winding valley up to the foot of Slide, five miles of primitive woods, how wild and cool it looks, its one voice the murmur of the creek! On the Wittenberg the sunshine lingers long; now it stands up like an island in a sea of shadows, then slowly sinks beneath the wave. The evening call of a robin or a thrush at his vespers makes a marked impression on the silence and the solitude.

The following day my friend and I pitched our tent in the woods beside the stream where I had pitched it twice before, and passed several delightful days, with trout in abundance and wild strawberries at intervals. Mrs. Larkins's cream-pot, butter-jar, and bread-box were within easy reach. Near the camp was an unusually large spring, of icy coldness, which served as our refrigerator. Trout or milk immersed in this spring in a tin pail would keep sweet four or five days. One night some creature, probably a lynx or a raccoon, came and lifted the stone from the pail that held the trout and took out a fine string of them, and ate them up on the spot, leaving only the string and one head. In August bears come down to an ancient and now brushy bark-peeling near by for blackberries. But the creature that most infests these backwoods is the porcupine. He is as stupid and

indifferent as the skunk; his broad, blunt nose points a witless head. They are great gnawers, and will gnaw your house down if you do not look out. Of a summer evening they will walk coolly into your open door if not prevented. The most annoying animal to the camper-out in this region, and the one he needs to be most on the lookout for, is the cow. Backwoods cows and young cattle seem always to be famished for salt, and they will fairly lick the fisherman's clothes off his back, and his tent and equipage out of existence, if you give them a chance. On one occasion some wood-ranging heifers and steers that had been hovering around our camp for some days made a raid upon it when we were absent. The tent was shut and everything snugged up, but they ran their long tongues under the tent, and, tasting something savory, hooked out John Stuart Mill's "Essays on Religion," which one of us had brought along, thinking to read in the woods. They mouthed the volume around a good deal, but its logic was too tough for them, and they contented themselves with devouring the paper in which it was wrapped. If the cattle had not been surprised at just that point, it is probable the tent would have gone down before their eager curiosity and thirst for salt.

The raid which Larkins's dog made upon our camp was amusing rather than annoying. He was a very friendly and intelligent shepherd dog, probably a collie. Hardly had we sat down to our first lunch in camp before he called on us. But as he was disposed to be too friendly, and to claim too large a share of the lunch, we rather gave him the cold shoulder. He did not

come again; but a few evenings afterward, as we sauntered over to the house on some trifling errand, the dog suddenly conceived a bright little project. He seemed to say to himself, on seeing us, "There come both of them now, just as I have been hoping they would; now, while they are away, I will run quickly over and know what they have got that a dog can eat." My companion saw the dog get up on our arrival, and go quickly in the direction of our camp, and he said something in the cur's manner suggested to him the object of his hurried departure. He called my attention to the fact, and we hastened back. On cautiously nearing camp, the dog was seen amid the pails in the shallow water of the creek investigating them. He had uncovered the butter, and was about to taste it, when we shouted, and he made quick steps for home, with a very "kill-sheep" look. When we again met him at the house next day he could not look us in the face, but sneaked off, utterly crestfallen. This was a clear case of reasoning on the part of the dog, and afterward a clear case of a sense of guilt from wrong-doing. The dog will probably be a man before any other animal.

III

BIRDS' EGGS

"Admire the bird's egg and leave it in its nest" is a wiser forbearance than "Love the wood-rose and leave it on its stalk." We will try to leave these eggs in the nest, and as far as possible show the bird and the nest with them.

The first egg of spring is undoubtedly a hen's egg. The domestic fowls, not being compelled to shift for themselves, and having artificial shelter, are not so mindful of the weather and the seasons as the wild birds. But the hen of the woods and the hen of the prairie, namely, the ruffed and the pinnated grouse, do not usually nest till the season is so far advanced that danger from frost is past.

The first wild egg, in New York and New England, is probably that of an owl, the great horned owl, it is said, laying as early as March. They probably shelter their eggs from the frost and the snow before incubation begins. The little screech owl waits till April, and seeks the deep snug cavity of an old tree; the heart of a decayed apple-tree suits him well. Begin your search by the middle of April, and before the month is past you will find the four white, round eggs resting upon a little dry grass or a few dry leaves in the bottom of a long cavity. Owls' eggs are inclined to be spherical. You would expect to see a big, round-headed,

round-eyed creature come out of such an egg.

The passenger pigeon nests before danger from frost is passed; but as it lays but two eggs, probably in two successive days, the risks from this source are not great, though occasionally a heavy April snow-storm breaks them up.

Which is the earliest song-bird's egg? One cannot be quite so certain here, as he can as to which the first wild flower is, for instance; but I would take my chances on finding that of the phœbe-bird first, and finding it before the close of April, unless the season is very backward. The present season (1883) a pair built their nest under the eaves of my house, and deposited their eggs, the last days of the month. Some English sparrows that had been hanging around, and doubtless watching the phœbes, threw the eggs out and took possession of the nest. How shrewd and quick to take the hint these little feathered John Bulls are! With a handful of rattling pebble-stones I told this couple very plainly that they were not welcome visitors to my premises. They fled precipitately. The next morning they appeared again, but were much shyer. Another discharge of pebbles, and they were off as if bound for the protection of the British flag, and did not return. I notice wherever I go that these birds have got a suspicion in their heads that public opinion has changed with regard to them, and that they are no longer wanted.

The eggs of the phœbe-bird are snow-white, and when, in threading the gorge of some mountain trout brook, or prowling about some high, overhanging ledge, one's eye falls upon this

mossy structure planted with such matchless art upon a little shelf of the rocks, with its complement of five or six pearl-like eggs, he is ready to declare it the most pleasing nest in all the range of our bird architecture. It was such a happy thought for the bird to build there, just out of the reach of all four-footed beasts of prey, sheltered from the storms and winds, and, by the use of moss and lichens, blending its nest so perfectly with its surroundings that only the most alert eye can detect it. An egg upon a rock, and thriving there, – the frailest linked to the strongest, as if the geology of the granite mountain had been bent into the service of the bird. I doubt if crows, or jays, or owls ever rob these nests. Phoebe has outwitted them. They never heard of the bird that builded its house upon a rock. "Strong is thy dwelling-place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock."

The song sparrow sometimes nests in April, but not commonly in our latitude. Emerson says, in "May-Day: " —

"The sparrow meek, prophetic-eyed,
Her nest beside the snow-drift weaves,
Secure the osier yet will hide
Her callow brood in mantling leaves."

But the sparrow usually prefers to wait till the snow-drift is gone. I have never found the nest of one till long after the last drift had disappeared from the fields, though a late writer upon New England birds says the sparrow sometimes lays in April, when snow is yet upon the ground.

The sparrow is not a beautiful bird except in our affections and associations, and its eggs are not beautiful as eggs go, – four or five little freckled spheres, that, like the bird itself, blend well with the ground upon which they are placed.

The eggs of the "chippie," or social sparrow, are probably the most beautiful of sparrow eggs, being of a bright bluish green with a ring of dark purple spots around the larger end.

Generally there is but little relation between the color of the bird and the color of its egg. For the most part, the eggs of birds that occupy open, exposed nests are of some tint that harmonizes well with the surroundings. With the addition of specks of various hue, they are rendered still less conspicuous. The eggs of the scarlet tanager are greenish blue, with faint brown or purplish markings. The blackbird lays a greenish blue egg also, with various markings. Indeed, the favorite ground tint of the birds that build open nests is a greenish blue; sometimes the blue predominates, sometimes the green; while the eggs of birds that build concealed nests, or lay in dark cavities, are generally white, as is the case with the eggs of all our woodpeckers, for instance. The eggs of the bluebird are bluish white.

Among the flycatchers, the nest of the phoebe is most concealed, at least from above, and her eggs are white, while those of nearly all the other species are more or less tinted and marked. The eggs of the hummingbird are white, but the diminutiveness of their receptacle is a sufficient concealment. Another white egg is that of the kingfisher, deposited upon fish-

bones at the end of a hole in the bank eight or nine feet long. The bank swallow also lays white eggs, as does the chimney swallow, the white-bellied swallow, and the purple martin. The eggs of the barn swallow and cliff swallow are more or less speckled. In England the kingfisher (smaller and much more brilliantly colored than ours), woodpeckers, the bank swallow, the swift, the wryneck (related to the woodpecker), and the dipper also lay white eggs.

A marked exception to the above rule is furnished by the eggs of the Baltimore oriole, perhaps the most fantastically marked of all our birds' eggs. One would hardly expect a plainly marked egg in such a high-swung, elaborately woven, deeply pouched, aristocratic nest. The threads and strings and horsehairs with which the structure is sewed and bound and stayed are copied in the curious lines and markings of the treasures it holds. After the oriole is through with its nest, it is sometimes taken possession of by the house wren in which to rear its second brood. The long, graceful cavity, with its fine carpet of hair, is filled with coarse twigs, as if one were to build a log hut in a palace, and the rusty-colored eggs of the little busybody deposited there. The wren would perhaps stick to its bundle of small fagots in the box or pump tree, and rear its second brood in the cradle of the first, were it not that by seeking new lodgings time can be saved. The male bird builds and furnishes the second nest, and the mother bird has begun to lay in it before the first is empty.

The chatter of a second brood of nearly fledged wrens is heard

now (August 20) in an oriole's nest suspended from the branch of an apple-tree near where I write. Earlier in the season the parent birds made long and determined attempts to establish themselves in a cavity that had been occupied by a pair of bluebirds. The original proprietor of the place was the downy woodpecker. He had excavated it the autumn before, and had passed the winter there, often to my certain knowledge lying abed till nine o'clock in the morning. In the spring he went elsewhere, probably with a female, to begin the season in new quarters. The bluebirds early took possession, and in June their first brood had flown. The wrens had been hanging around, evidently with an eye on the place (such little comedies may be witnessed anywhere), and now very naturally thought it was their turn. A day or two after the young bluebirds had flown, I noticed some fine, dry grass clinging to the entrance to the cavity; a circumstance which I understood a few moments later, when the wren rushed by me into the cover of a small Norway spruce, hotly pursued by the male bluebird. It was a brown streak and a blue streak pretty close together. The wrens had gone to housecleaning, and the bluebird had returned to find his bed and bedding being pitched out-of-doors, and had thereupon given the wrens to understand in the most emphatic manner that he had no intention of vacating the premises so early in the season. Day after day, for more than two weeks, the male bluebird had to clear his premises of these intruders. It occupied much of his time and not a little of mine, as I sat with a book in a summer-house near by, laughing at

his pretty fury and spiteful onset. On two occasions the wren rushed under the chair in which I sat, and a streak of blue lightning almost flashed in my very face. One day, just as I had passed the tree in which the cavity was placed, I heard the wren scream desperately; turning, I saw the little vagabond fall into the grass with the wrathful bluebird fairly upon him; the latter had returned just in time to catch him, and was evidently bent on punishing him well. But in the squabble in the grass the wren escaped and took refuge in the friendly evergreen. The bluebird paused for a moment with outstretched wings looking for the fugitive, then flew away. A score of times during the month of June did I see the wren taxing every energy to get away from the bluebird. He would dart into the stone wall, under the floor of the summer-house, into the weeds, – anywhere to hide his diminished head. The bluebird, with his bright coat, looked like an officer in uniform in pursuit of some wicked, rusty little street gamin. Generally the favorite house of refuge of the wrens was the little spruce, into which their pursuer made no attempt to follow them. The female would sit concealed amid the branches, chattering in a scolding, fretful way, while the male with his eye upon his tormentor would perch on the topmost shoot and sing. Why he sang at such times, whether in triumph and derision, or to keep his courage up and reassure his mate, I could not make out. When his song was suddenly cut short, and I glanced to see him dart down into the spruce, my eye usually caught a twinkle of blue wings hovering near. The wrens finally gave up the fight,

and their enemies reared their second brood in peace.

That the wren should use such coarse, refractory materials, especially since it builds in holes where twigs are so awkward to carry and adjust, is curious enough. All its congeners, the marsh wrens, the Carolina wren, the winter wren, build of soft flexible materials. The nest of the winter wren, and of the English "Jenny Wren," is mainly of moss, and is a marvel of softness and warmth.

One day a swarm of honey-bees went into my chimney, and I mounted the stack to see into which flue they had gone. As I craned my neck above the sooty vent, with the bees humming about my ears, the first thing my eye rested upon in the black interior was two long white pearls upon a little shelf of twigs, the nest of the chimney swallow, or swift, – honey, soot, and birds' eggs closely associated. The bees, though in an unused flue, soon found the gas of anthracite that hovered about the top of the chimney too much for them, and they left. But the swallows are not repelled by smoke. They seem to have entirely abandoned their former nesting-places in hollow trees and stumps and to frequent only chimneys. A tireless bird, never perching, all day upon the wing, and probably capable of flying one thousand miles in twenty-four hours, they do not even stop to gather materials for their nests, but snap off the small dry twigs from the treetops as they fly by. Confine one of these swallows to a room and it will not perch, but after flying till it becomes bewildered and exhausted, it clings to the side of the wall till it dies. I

once found one in my room on returning, after several days' absence, in which life seemed nearly extinct; its feet grasped my finger as I removed it from the wall, but its eyes closed, and it seemed about on the point of joining its companion which lay dead upon the floor. Tossing it into the air, however, seemed to awaken its wonderful powers of flight, and away it went straight toward the clouds. On the wing the chimney swallow looks like an athlete stripped for the race. There is the least appearance of quill and plumage of any of our birds, and, with all its speed and marvelous evolutions, the effect of its flight is stiff and wiry. There appears to be but one joint in the wing, and that next the body. This peculiar inflexible motion of the wings, as if they were little sickles of sheet iron, seems to be owing to the length and development of the primary quills and the smallness of the secondary. The wing appears to hinge only at the wrist. The barn swallow lines its rude masonry with feathers, but the swift begins life on bare twigs, glued together by a glue of home manufacture as adhesive as Spaulding's.

I have wondered if Emerson referred to any particular bird in these lines from "The Problem: " —

"Know'st thou what wove yon wood-bird's nest
Of leaves, and feathers from her breast?"

Probably not, but simply availed himself of the general belief that certain birds or fowls lined their nests with their own

feathers. This is notably true of the eider duck, and in a measure of our domestic fowls, but so far as I know is not true of any of our small birds. The barn swallow and house wren feather their nests at the expense of the hens and geese. The winter wren picks up the feathers of the ruffed grouse. The chickadee, Emerson's favorite bird, uses a few feathers in its upholstering, but not its own. In England, I noticed that the little willow warbler makes a free use of feathers from the poultry yard. Many of our birds use hair in their nests, and the kingbird and cedar-bird like wool. I have found a single feather of the bird's own in the nest of the phoebe. Such a circumstance would perhaps justify the poet.

About the first of June there is a nest in the woods upon the ground with four creamy white eggs in it, spotted with brown or lilac, chiefly about the larger ends, that always gives the walker, who is so lucky as to find it, a thrill of pleasure. It is like a ground sparrow's nest with a roof or canopy to it. The little brown or olive backed bird starts away from your feet and runs swiftly and almost silently over the dry leaves, and then turns her speckled breast to see if you are following. She walks very prettily, by far the prettiest pedestrian in the woods. But if she thinks you have discovered her secret, she feigns lameness and disability of both legs and wing, to decoy you into the pursuit of her. This is the golden-crowned thrush, or accentor, a strictly wood bird, about the size of a song sparrow, with the dullest of gold upon his crown, but the brightest of songs in his heart. The last nest of this bird I found was while in quest of the pink cypripedium. We

suddenly spied a couple of the flowers a few steps from the path along which we were walking, and had stooped to admire them, when out sprang the bird from beside them, doubtless thinking she was the subject of observation instead of the flowers that swung their purple bells but a foot or two above her. But we never should have seen her had she kept her place. She had found a rent in the matted carpet of dry leaves and pine needles that covered the ground, and into this had insinuated her nest, the leaves and needles forming a canopy above it, sloping to the south and west, the source of the more frequent summer rains.

At about the same time one finds the nest above described, if he were to explore the woods very thoroughly, he might chance upon two curious eggs lying upon the leaves as if dropped there by chance. They are elliptical, both ends of a size, about an inch and a quarter long, of a creamy white spotted with lavender. These are the eggs of the whip-poor-will, a bird that has absolutely no architectural instincts or gifts. Perhaps its wide, awkward mouth and short beak are ill-adapted to carrying nest materials. It is awkward upon the ground and awkward upon the tree, being unable to perch upon a limb, except lengthwise of it.

The song and game birds lay pointed eggs, but the night birds lay round or elliptical eggs.

The egg-collector sometimes stimulates a bird to lay an unusual number of eggs. A youth, whose truthfulness I do not doubt, told me he once induced a high-hole to lay twenty-nine eggs by robbing her of an egg each day. The eggs became smaller

and smaller, till the twenty-ninth one was only the size of a chippie's egg. At this point the bird gave up the contest.

There is a last egg of summer as well as a first egg of spring, but one cannot name either with much confidence. Both the robin and the chippie sometimes rear a third brood in August; but the birds that delay their nesting till midsummer are the goldfinch and the cedar-bird, the former waiting for the thistle to ripen its seeds, and the latter probably for the appearance of certain insects which it takes on the wing. Often the cedar-bird does not build till August, and will line its nest with wool if it can get it, even in this sultry month. The eggs are marked and colored, as if a white egg were to be spotted with brown, then colored a pale blue, then again sharply dotted or blotched with blackish or purplish spots.

But the most common August nest with me – early August – is that of the goldfinch, – a deep, snug, compact nest, with no loose ends hanging, placed in the fork of a small limb of an apple-tree, peach-tree, or ornamental shade-tree. The eggs are a faint bluish white.

While the female is sitting, the male feeds her regularly. She calls to him on his approach, or when she hears his voice passing by, in the most affectionate, feminine, childlike tones, the only case I know of where the sitting bird makes any sound while in the act of incubation. When a rival male invades the tree, or approaches too near, the male whose nest it holds pursues and reasons or expostulates with him in the same bright, amicable,

confiding tones. Indeed, most birds make use of their sweetest notes in war. The song of love is the song of battle, too. The male yellowbirds flit about from point to point, apparently assuring each other of the highest sentiments of esteem and consideration, at the same time that one intimates to the other that he is carrying his joke a little too far. It has the effect of saying with mild and good-humored surprise, "Why, my dear sir, this is my territory; you surely do not mean to trespass; permit me to salute you, and to escort you over the line." Yet the intruder does not always take the hint. Occasionally the couple have a brief sparring match in the air, and mount up and up, beak to beak, to a considerable height, but rarely do they actually come to blows.

The yellowbird becomes active and conspicuous after the other birds have nearly all withdrawn from the stage and become silent, their broods reared and flown. August is his month, his festive season. It is his turn now. The thistles are ripening their seeds, and his nest is undisturbed by jay-bird or crow. He is the first bird I hear in the morning, circling and swinging through the air in that peculiar undulating flight, and calling out on the downward curve of each stroke, "Here we go, here we go!" Every hour in the day he indulges in his circling, billowy flight. It is a part of his musical performance. His course at such times is a deeply undulating line, like the long gentle roll of the summer sea, the distance from crest to crest or from valley to valley being probably thirty feet; this distance is made with but one brief beating of the wings on the downward curve. As he quickly

opens them, they give him a strong upward impulse, and he describes the long arc with them closely folded. Thus, falling and recovering, rising and sinking like dolphins in the sea, he courses through the summer air. In marked contrast to this feat is his manner of flying when he indulges in a brief outburst of song in the air. Now he flies level, with broad expanded wings nearly as round and as concave as two shells, which beat the air slowly. The song is the chief matter now, and the wings are used only to keep him afloat while delivering it. In the other case, the flight is the main concern, and the voice merely punctuates it.

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