

VARIOUS

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THE BANFFSHIRE NATURALIST

Our old friend, Samuel Smiles, now a veteran in literature, who has been indefatigable in writing of the power of Self-help, has, as one of his late exploits, narrated in a most amusing and instructive manner the *Life of a Scotch Naturalist*, Thomas Edward, who at an advanced age modestly occupies the position of a working shoemaker in Banff. This is a curious and interesting book. Few persons would have taken the trouble that Mr Smiles has done to narrate the efforts in pursuit of a knowledge of Nature of so very obscure and poor a man as is the hero of his remarkable biography. The thing is altogether unique. Nothing but vast kindness of heart, along with the pleasure of shewing what can be done by constant self-denial and industry, could have influenced the benevolent writer. As probably not many of our readers have yet had an opportunity of seeing the work – a beautifully embellished duodecimo of four hundred pages, published by John Murray, London – we shall try to give a sort of abridged history of the now famed Scotch naturalist, with such observations as occur to us.

Thomas Edward, born in 1814, is the son of a private in the Fifeshire militia, who on the breaking up of his regiment, resided for a short time at Kettle, his native place in Fife, and then, for the sake of work as a handloom weaver, settled with his wife and child at Aberdeen. Here the boy was brought up in the usual rough way experienced by the humbler class of Scotch children. He ran about barefooted, was poorly fed, and required pretty much to find his own amusement. His parents, while willing to do their best for him, soon found that he was far from being easily managed. He was intractable, and in a very strange way. While still a child, he demonstrated an extraordinary love of animals of all kinds. He took delight in dogs, cats, pigs, hens, birds of every kind, and every description of small creatures, down to bees, beetles, flies, spiders, and so on – in fact, any living thing he could lay hold of; even rats and mice did not come amiss. This idiosyncrasy considerably puzzled and vexed the father and mother. Not understanding him, he was scolded and cuffed, but all to no use. The boy was moved by a predominant passion, amounting to a species of mania. When asked what he meant by his eccentricities, he said he could not tell. His love of Nature was an unconquerable instinct.

Tam Edward, as he was ordinarily called, was thought to be in some degree out of his senses. At from four to five years of age he was sent to a dame's school, but did not long continue at it; for being found to have a kae or jackdaw in his pocket, that caused some trouble, he was summarily dismissed by the schoolmistress. Another school received him, and here ensued a similar catastrophe. The teacher was plagued beyond endurance by his bringing all kinds of disagreeable little creatures to school. On one occasion he brought with him a bottleful of horse-leeches which he had gathered in a neighbouring pool. All went on smoothly until one of the leeches escaping, crawled up a boy's leg, and a fearful commotion ensued. Telling the culprit to take his bottle of leeches and begone, the schoolmaster turned Tam to the door, at the same time bringing down the taws so heavily upon him that he thought his back was broken. Another school was tried; but there he was worse used. One morning the master felt something creeping on his arm, which shaking from him proved to be a centipede. Edward was at once called up and accused of bringing the creature to the school. The charge was quite erroneous, for he had not done so. His denial was unavailing, and by the enraged teacher he was beaten in a most unjust and unmerciful manner. Finally, he told the poor boy to take his slate and books and go about his business. Thus he was expelled from his third and last school. Disgusted with the cruel treatment he had received, he positively refused to go to any other school. So

there, at six years of age his education ended. He could read, knew a little of arithmetic – nothing of writing and grammar. He had already acquired somewhat idle habits vagrandising in quest of animals, but he was honest, exceedingly truthful, and by no means indisposed to work for a livelihood. For about two years he was employed at a tobacco-work at a short distance from the town. This was a happy time, for in going to and returning from his labour in the factory, he had pleasant rambles in the woods and plantations, which afforded opportunities for picking up a knowledge of birds, insects, wild-flowers, and plants, the like of which he had never seen before.

It was a hapless thing that this eagerly inquiring child had no one to direct him in a way likely to be useful. His father and mother had no sympathy for his love of nature. All they cared about was to have him apprenticed to some regular trade, by which he would gain his living. At length they succeeded in apprenticing him to a shoemaker, named Begg, who proved to be a dissolute drunken vagabond, very ill qualified to teach the boy his business. Tam, however, learnt to make upper-leathers, and was proceeding to make shoe-bottoms, when all went wrong on the discovery that he brought boxes of butterflies and such like to the workshop; the sight of them usually throwing Begg into a rage. Doubtless, it was indiscreet to bring his pet animals with him; but there ought to have been allowances on account of his youth, as well as from the fact that he never spent a moment of his master's time on his amusements. One afternoon, when waiting till his master came in to allow him to go to dinner, and while he had no work to do, he amused himself with a young sparrow which he had taught to do a number of little tricks. The master, entering in a drunken fury, struck Edward such a blow as laid him flat on the floor, and then trampled the bird with his foot. Picking up the poor and innocent creature, Tam found it was still breathing. He put it tenderly in his bosom, and went home crying over the unprovoked outrage. Shewing the mangled and dead bird to his mother, he said he did not care so much for himself, if only the bird had been spared, adding that 'if Begg struck him again without a cause, he would certainly run away. She strongly remonstrated against this, because, being bound apprentice for six years, he must serve out his time, come what would.'

Persuaded to return to the shoemaker's shop, young Edward struggled on till three years of his wretched apprenticeship had passed over. Then, there was a climax. The boy had brought three young moles ensconced in his bonnet. Begg, now more drunken than ever, discovered the moles, killed them on the spot, knocked down his apprentice with a last, dragged him to the door and threw him into the street. A good deal hurt, Edward resolved he would no longer serve under such a monster. And he kept his word. Begg threatened the terrors of the law; but, perhaps, conscious of his brutality, he did nothing. For a time the youth was a kind of loose waif. He thought of being a sailor, but could get no one to take him to serve on board a ship. He had an uncle at Kettle in Fife; and without telling any one, he went off to walk all the way to Kettle, a distance of about a hundred miles, living on morsels of bread he had in his pocket, and sleeping at night among whins or under the shelter of a haystack. All the money he possessed was sixpence, which was just sufficient to pay his fare in the ferry-boat across the Tay. But how was he to pay a pontage of a penny to cross the Esk at Montrose? That was a distressing consideration, yet he would not beg, nor would he break in upon the sixpence for the ferry. He tried again and again to sell his pocket-knife for a penny, and only succeeded in doing so when he came in sight of the bridge. The toil and privation endured in the journey were fruitless. The uncle, a mean-spirited wretch, would do nothing for him, and sent him back to Aberdeen with a present of eighteen-pence to pay his expenses on the road.

The parents of Thomas Edward were glad to see him again, for they were afraid he was lost. By their advice he procured work in making shoes of a light kind, his new employer being of a kindlier nature than Begg. In this situation, and at another shoemaking concern, he completed his knowledge of the craft, which, however, he never liked, and stuck to it only as a means of livelihood. As a kind of interlude in his occupation, he enlisted in the Aberdeenshire Militia in 1831. For the period he served as a soldier he acquitted himself creditably. His only escapade consisted in having on one occasion quitted the ranks while on drill to try to catch a butterfly which struck his fancy. It was a grave military

offence; but at the intercession of some ladies with the officer on duty, was passed over lightly. When Edward was about twenty years old, he left Aberdeen with his father and mother to reside in Banff, a much smaller town, where his chances of advancement were materially lessened. The removal was a blunder, and entailed on the young naturalist a life-long depression of circumstances. Situated on the shore of the Moray Firth, where that fine estuary expands into the German Ocean, Banff is doubtless favourably adapted for explorations in Natural History. Edward was so far highly favoured, but the poor fellow had to live by his daily manual labour, and unfriended as well as unsympathised with in this remote sea-side town, there was no prospect of improving his position.

Good or bad, here Edward was fixed; and how, in the midst of daily toils and cares, he found time to accumulate a vast store of knowledge concerning animals and plants, is truly wonderful. Some may think he made a mistake in marrying when no more than twenty-three years old. But his wife was a sensible, prudent woman, and gave him a happy home. 'Mutual affection,' as our author observes, 'makes up for much.' Perhaps they occasionally felt the bitterness of poverty, for Edward's earnings did not yet amount to more than about nine shillings and sixpence a week!

With nothing but the most elementary education, without books, without advisers, the young shoemaker made up for everything by immense diligence, by sobriety, and a keen disregard of personal inconvenience. In his assigned hours of labour he worked hard. He never spent a moment idly. He never entered a public-house, nor drank anything stronger than water. In his expenditure he was rigorously economical. All his spare time was devoted to his favourite pursuit, that of acquiring a knowledge of animals by painstaking practical inquiry. When he began these inquiries, he did not even know the correct names of the animals he sought for, because he had no books and nobody to tell him. He was a thoroughly original student of nature. He learned everything by personal observation. Nothing but a degree of enthusiasm amounting to fanaticism could have impelled him to endure cold, wet, hunger, want of sleep, in order to add to his stock of facts. His fellow-shoemakers jeered at him for not joining in their vicious and costly indulgences; but he held on his way. There, we think, was manifested his heroic, his noble struggle – not that he ever esteemed it to be a struggle, for he only followed the bent of a simple self-sacrificing character; but his conduct in this respect was not less worthy of admiration.

Whatever were the sacrifices made by Edward, he was compensated, as an intense lover of Nature. Describing his tastes and pursuits, Mr Smiles says: 'Everything that lived and breathed had charms for him. He loved the fields, the woods, the moors. The living presence of the earth was always about him, and he eagerly drank in its spirit. The babbling brooks, the whispering trees, the aspects of the clouds, the driving wind, were all sources of delight... He felt himself free amidst the liberty of Nature... As his wanderings were almost invariably conducted at night, he had abundant opportunities of seeing not only the ocean, but the heavens in their various aspects. What were these stars so far off in the sky? Were they worlds? Were they but the outposts of the earth, from which other worlds were to be seen, far beyond the ken of the most powerful telescope? To use Edward's own words: "I can never succeed in describing my unbounded admiration of the works of the Almighty; not only the wonderful works which we ourselves see upon earth, but those countless orbs which roll both near and far in the endless immensity of space – the Home of Eternity. Everything that moves or lives, everything that grows, everything created or formed by the hand or will of the Omnipotent, has such a fascinating charm for me, and sends such a thrill of pleasure through my whole frame, that to describe my feelings is utterly impossible."'

Early in the spring of 1838, Edward began to form a collection of specimens in natural history, for which he taught himself to stuff and prepare the animals he was able to secure. In his researches he was aided by an old gun, which he had bought for four-and-sixpence. Sallying out at nine o'clock at night, when his day's work was over, with his gun and some insect boxes and bottles, and putting a piece of oat-cake in his pocket for supper, he scoured the country as long as it was daylight for any living thing that came in his way. 'When it became so dark that he could no longer observe, he

dropped down by the side of a bank, or a bush, or a tree, whichever came handiest, and there he dozed or slept until the light returned. Then he got up, and again began his observations, which he continued until the time arrived when he had to return to his daily labour.' On Saturday evenings he returned home by twelve o'clock, so as not to encroach on the weekly day of rest. On Monday mornings he contrived to have a few hours' observation before six o'clock. As he was known to live soberly and honestly, there was no suspicion that he was either a poacher or a burglar, yet these nocturnal ramblings were incomprehensible. People at length gave him up as an oddity. Gamekeepers did not think of molesting him in his explorations. Occasionally, he took up his quarters for the night in a ruined castle, in some disused building, a sand-hole or cavern amidst the rocks by the sea-shore, the shelter of a table-shaped gravestone in a churchyard, or anywhere. This was a most dismal mode of spending the night; for independently of exposure to the weather, he was liable to be visited by polecats, weasels, badgers, or other wild animals sniffing about him. There was, however, always a chance of catching moths and other creatures that flutter or roam about in the dark. Sometimes he was bitten on the hands by weasels and rats during his disturbed sleep, and on one occasion he had a tremendous encounter with a polecat. When morning broke, he had excellent opportunities of studying the habits of the skylark, blackbird, thrush, and other early choristers.

By these assiduous labours he had, by 1845, collected two thousand specimens, consisting of quadrupeds, birds, reptiles, fishes, crustacea, starfish, zoophytes, corals, sponges, and other objects. He assorted the whole in cases made from old tea-boxes, fashioned by his own hands, and which he neatly papered and glazed. With some pride, he made a public exhibition of his collection at a local fair; and by it not only paid his expenses, but had something over for future purposes. This measure of success induced him to exhibit his collection at Aberdeen. Although advertised, and spoken favourably of by the newspapers, the exhibition was a failure. There was no rush of visitors, as Edward fondly expected. In fact, the exhibition did not nearly pay expenses. Dreading the horror of being in debt, he offered the collection for sale; and in desperation accepted an offer of twenty pounds ten shillings for the whole of what had cost him eight years' labour exclusive of outlay. The gentleman who bought this very fine collection unfortunately stored the specimens in a damp room, and the whole went to ruin. So ended this unfortunate enterprise. Aberdeen and Banff shires lost an opportunity of not only helping a most deserving man of genius, but of acquiring a splendid collection illustrative of the natural history of the two counties.

Though terribly crushed, on returning to his home in Banff, he went to work at his usual trade of making the lighter kinds of women's shoes, in which he was reputed to excel. Then, he resumed his researches by the sea-shore, and in a short time began a new collection of specimens. Suddenly he met with a grievous accident. He rolled down a rocky precipice a depth of forty feet, falling on his gun, which was smashed to pieces, and receiving such bodily injuries as confined him for weeks to the house. To support his family during his illness, he was under the necessity of selling a portion of his newly formed collection.

About this time, Edward had the good fortune to attract the attention of the Rev. James Smith, of the parish of Montquhitter, a place a few miles from Banff. This gentleman having a strong love of natural history, and possessing a good collection of books, did an important service in offering hints to Edward, and in lending him books to enable him to define and classify various animals which he caught. So instructed he began to write observations on natural objects, which appeared in the *Banffshire Journal*. Afterwards, at the suggestion of Mr Smith, he sent papers to the *Zoologist*, the *Naturalist*, and the *Linnean Journal*, through which channels his name and qualities as a writer became known to naturalists generally. The result was a considerable private correspondence, and an enlargement of his knowledge regarding the names and species of animals, but with no improvement in circumstances – rather the reverse, for being ever on the brink of starvation, the expense for paper and postage stamps pressed severely on his resources. Yet, he willingly gave such information as he possessed to all who requested his assistance. Considering Edward's meagre education and his

inexperience of literary composition, his papers, of which some extracts are given by Mr Smiles, strike us with surprise. Besides being correctly written, they have all the elegance and graphic force of Audubon. How, by those scientific inquirers, who had the best means of judging of his talents, Edward should have been suffered to drag on existence at a mechanical employment which never seems to have yielded him twenty shillings a week, is not very easily understood. No doubt, he was shy in pushing himself forward. He had none of the saliency of character which through devious adventure leads to fortune; but these palliatives scarcely explain the strange neglect which he experienced.

Nobly, but still obscurely struggling on, a great misfortune befell Edward in the death of Mr Smith in 1854. There, a true friend was gone. As some assuagement of his loss, he found a friend and counsellor in the Rev. Mr Boyd, parish minister of Crimond, whose hospitable manse was always open to him when he visited the neighbourhood. But ere long, Mr Boyd died suddenly, and here was a fresh and agonising bereavement. By 1858, Edward had accumulated a large and splendid collection, but at the cost of his health and strength. 'He had used himself so hardly; he had spent so many of his nights out of doors in the cold and wet; he had been so tumbled about amongst the rocks; he had so often, with all his labours, to endure privation, even to the want of oatmeal – that it is scarcely to be wondered at if, at that time, his constitution should have begun to shew marks of decay.' There was a fever and illness of a month, which led to a fresh sale of articles in his collection; and on getting well, he was distinctly told by his medical attendant 'that if he did not at once desist from his nightly wanderings, his life would not be worth a farthing.' From this time, making fewer pulls on his constitution, he more particularly devoted himself to investigations along the sea-shore, capturing rare fish, crustacea, and zoophytes.

In these sea-side researches he was considerably aided by one of his daughters, who poking about among fishing villages, procured the refuse material brought up by nets, in which many most interesting small animals new to science were discovered. From the stomachs of cod-fish he procured innumerable specimens of animals which had been voraciously swallowed. By these and other means he gained no little celebrity for his additions to a knowledge of the myriads of creatures which inhabit the depths of the ocean. Twenty-six new species of crustacea were discovered by himself alone in the Moray Firth.

Some honours – none of them of any value in a money point of view – were now awarded to Edward. The Linnean Society having discovered his genius and talent, unanimously elected him an Associate in 1866. Immediately afterwards, the Natural History Society of Aberdeen unanimously admitted him a member; and in 1867 he received the diploma of the Glasgow Natural History Society. 'Although Banff,' says Mr Smiles, 'possessed an "Institution for Science, Literature, and the Arts, and for the encouragement of native genius and talent," the members did not even elect Edward an honorary member. The scientific men of Banff fought shy of the native shoemaker.'

It is pleasing to know that Thomas Edward is still in the land of the living, and though broken down in health, is cheerful, contented, and able to a certain extent for his accustomed duties. Latterly, he has in many ways derived comfort and assistance from his grown-up daughters. His searches after strange sorts of animals are at an end. He has fought the fight of science unaided, and he has fought it well. He has likewise fought the fight of poverty; for he has always lived within his means, and owes no man anything. Therein, independently of his sacrifices in behalf of science, lies the grandeur of his character. In these days, when the gospel of idleness is so eloquently preached, and so readily responded to, we should be glad if it were in our power to fix the attention of the masses on what this humble shoemaker has done by dint of self-denial and the careful economising of time. Expecting no one to make such extraordinary sacrifices, we would say: Look, ye misspenders of idle time, ye wasters of existence, ye thriftless dram-drinkers, ye vacant-minded street loungers, what was done by one as poor, if not poorer, than yourselves! All we ask is that, reflecting a little on your responsibilities, you would endeavour to take to heart the thrilling and instructive instance we have presented of A Noble Struggle!

W. C.

P.S. – Since writing the above, we have learned that a fund to succour Thomas Edward has been commenced at Aberdeen. The still more gratifying fact is announced that 'the Queen has been much interested in reading his biography by Mr Smiles, and touched by his successful pursuit of natural science under all the cares and troubles of daily toil; Her Majesty, therefore, has been graciously pleased to confer on him a pension of fifty pounds a year.' The concluding days of the Scottish Naturalist will thus be passed in the degree of freedom from toil and anxiety which he so eminently deserves.

THE LAST OF THE HADDONS

CHAPTER V. – 'I AM LILIAN.'

I stood for a few moments at the window in contemplation of the beautiful view of the surrounding country, so wide and varied and well wooded; then, afraid of the sentiment which was creeping upon me again, I turned away, and set resolutely to work at unpacking. After putting my small belongings into something like order, I proceeded to make the best of myself for presentation to 'Miss Farrar.' It was the first time I had seen myself from head to foot as I now did in the large cheval glass, and I gazed not a little curiously, as well as anxiously and critically, at the *tout ensemble*. What should I look like to a lover, who I knew was an admirer of women's beauty in the way a good man can admire it? What did I look, to myself?

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