

Hawthorne Nathaniel

Our Old Home. Volume 2



Nathaniel Hawthorne
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VII.

NEAR OXFORD

On a fine morning in September we set out on an excursion to Blenheim, – the sculptor and myself being seated on the box of our four-horse carriage, two more of the party in the dicky, and the others less agreeably accommodated inside. We had no coachman, but two postilions in short scarlet jackets and leather breeches with top-boots, each astride of a horse; so that, all the way along, when not otherwise attracted, we had the interesting spectacle of their up-and-down bobbing in the saddle. It was a sunny and beautiful day, a specimen of the perfect English weather, just warm enough for comfort, – indeed, a little too warm, perhaps, in the noontide sun, – yet retaining a mere spice or suspicion of austerity, which made it all the more enjoyable.

The country between Oxford and Blenheim is not particularly interesting, being almost level, or undulating very slightly; nor

is Oxfordshire, agriculturally, a rich part of England. We saw one or two hamlets, and I especially remember a picturesque old gabled house at a turnpike gate, and, altogether, the wayside scenery had an aspect of old-fashioned English life; but there was nothing very memorable till we reached Woodstock, and stopped to water our horses at the Black Bear. This neighborhood is called New Woodstock, but has by no means the brand-new appearance of an American town, being a large village of stone houses, most of them pretty well time-worn and weather-stained. The Black Bear is an ancient inn, large and respectable, with balustraded staircases, and intricate passages and corridors, and queer old pictures and engravings hanging in the entries and apartments. We ordered a lunch (the most delightful of English institutions, next to dinner) to be ready against our return, and then resumed our drive to Blenheim.

The park gate of Blenheim stands close to the end of the village street of Woodstock. Immediately on passing through its portals we saw the stately palace in the distance, but made a wide circuit of the park before approaching it. This noble park contains three thousand acres of land, and is fourteen miles in circumference. Having been, in part, a royal domain before it was granted to the Marlborough family, it contains many trees of unsurpassed antiquity, and has doubtless been the haunt of game and deer for centuries. We saw pheasants in abundance, feeding in the open lawns and glades; and the stags tossed their antlers and bounded away, not affrighted, but only shy and gamesome,

as we drove by. It is a magnificent pleasure-ground, not too tamely kept, nor rigidly subjected within rule, but vast enough to have lapsed back into nature again, after all the pains that the landscape-gardeners of Queen Anne's time bestowed on it, when the domain of Blenheim was scientifically laid out. The great, knotted, slanting trunks of the old oaks do not now look as if man had much intermeddled with their growth and postures. The trees of later date, that were set out in the Great Duke's time, are arranged on the plan of the order of battle in which the illustrious commander ranked his troops at Blenheim; but the ground covered is so extensive, and the trees now so luxuriant, that the spectator is not disagreeably conscious of their standing in military array, as if Orpheus had summoned them together by beat of drum. The effect must have been very formal a hundred and fifty years ago, but has ceased to be so, – although the trees, I presume, have kept their ranks with even more fidelity than Marlborough's veterans did.

One of the park-keepers, on horseback, rode beside our carriage, pointing out the choice views, and glimpses at the palace, as we drove through the domain. There is a very large artificial lake (to say the truth, it seemed to me fully worthy of being compared with the Welsh lakes, at least, if not with those of Westmoreland), which was created by Capability Brown, and fills the basin that he scooped for it, just as if Nature had poured these broad waters into one of her own valleys. It is a most beautiful object at a distance, and not less so on its

immediate banks; for the water is very pure, being supplied by a small river, of the choicest transparency, which was turned thitherward for the purpose. And Blenheim owes not merely this water scenery, but almost all its other beauties, to the contrivance of man. Its natural features are not striking; but Art has effected such wonderful things that the uninstructed visitor would never guess that nearly the whole scene was but the embodied thought of a human mind. A skillful painter hardly does more for his blank sheet of canvas than the landscape-gardener, the planter, the arranger of trees, has done for the monotonous surface of Blenheim, – making the most of every undulation, – flinging down a hillock, a big lump of earth out of a giant's hand, wherever it was needed, – putting in beauty as often as there was a niche for it, – opening vistas to every point that deserved to be seen, and throwing a veil of impenetrable foliage around what ought to be hidden; – and then, to be sure, the lapse of a century has softened the harsh outline of man's labors, and has given the place back to Nature again with the addition of what consummate science could achieve.

After driving a good way, we came to a battlemented tower and adjoining house, which used to be the residence of the Ranger of Woodstock Park, who held charge of the property for the King before the Duke of Marlborough possessed it. The keeper opened the door for us, and in the entrance-hall we found various things that had to do with the chase and woodland sports. We mounted the staircase, through several stories, up to the top

of the tower, whence there was a view of the spires of Oxford, and of points much farther off, – very indistinctly seen, however, as is usually the case with the misty distances of England. Returning to the ground-floor, we were ushered into the room in which died Wilmot, the wicked Earl of Rochester, who was Ranger of the Park in Charles II.'s time. It is a low and bare little room, with a window in front, and a smaller one behind; and in the contiguous entrance-room there are the remains of an old bedstead, beneath the canopy of which, perhaps, Rochester may have made the penitent end that Bishop Burnet attributes to him. I hardly know what it is, in this poor fellow's character, which affects us with greater tenderness on his behalf than for all the other profligates of his day, who seem to have been neither better nor worse than himself. I rather suspect that he had a human heart which never quite died out of him, and the warmth of which is still faintly perceptible amid the dissolute trash which he left behind.

Methinks, if such good fortune ever befell a bookish man, I should choose this lodge for my own residence, with the top-most room of the tower for a study, and all the seclusion of cultivated wildness beneath to ramble in. There being no such possibility, we drove on, catching glimpses of the palace in new points of view, and by and by came to Rosamond's Well. The particular tradition that connects Fair Rosamond with it is not now in my memory; but if Rosamond ever lived and loved, and ever had her abode in the maze of Woodstock, it may well be

believed that she and Henry sometimes sat beside this spring. It gushes out from a bank, through some old stone-work, and dashes its little cascade (about as abundant as one might turn out of a large pitcher) into a pool, whence it steals away towards the lake, which is not far removed. The water is exceedingly cold, and as pure as the legendary Rosamond was not, and is fancied to possess medicinal virtues, like springs at which saints have quenched their thirst. There were two or three old women and some children in attendance with tumblers, which they present to visitors, full of the consecrated water; but most of us filled the tumblers for ourselves, and drank.

Thence we drove to the Triumphal Pillar which was erected in honor of the Great Duke, and on the summit of which he stands, in a Roman garb, holding a winged figure of Victory in his hand, as an ordinary man might hold a bird. The column is I know not how many feet high, but lofty enough, at any rate, to elevate Marlborough far above the rest of the world, and to be visible a long way off; and it is so placed in reference to other objects, that, wherever the hero wandered about his grounds, and especially as he issued from his mansion, he must inevitably have been reminded of his glory. In truth, until I came to Blenheim, I never had so positive and material an idea of what Fame really is – of what the admiration of his country can do for a successful warrior – as I carry away with me and shall always retain. Unless he had the moral force of a thousand men together, his egotism (beholding himself everywhere, imbuing the entire

soil, growing in the woods, rippling and gleaming in the water, and pervading the very air with his greatness) must have been swollen within him like the liver of a Strasburg goose. On the huge tablets inlaid into the pedestal of the column, the entire Act of Parliament, bestowing Blenheim on the Duke of Marlborough and his posterity, is engraved in deep letters, painted black on the marble ground. The pillar stands exactly a mile from the principal front of the palace, in a straight line with the precise centre of its entrance-hall; so that, as already said, it was the Duke's principal object of contemplation.

We now proceeded to the palace-gate, which is a great pillared archway, of wonderful loftiness and state, giving admittance into a spacious quadrangle. A stout, elderly, and rather surly footman in livery appeared at the entrance, and took possession of whatever canes, umbrellas, and parasols he could get hold of, in order to claim sixpence on our departure. This had a somewhat ludicrous effect. There is much public outcry against the meanness of the present Duke in his arrangements for the admission of visitors (chiefly, of course, his native countrymen) to view the magnificent palace which their forefathers bestowed upon his own. In many cases, it seems hard that a private abode should be exposed to the intrusion of the public merely because the proprietor has inherited or created a splendor which attracts general curiosity; insomuch that his home loses its sanctity and seclusion for the very reason that it is better than other men's houses. But in the case of Blenheim, the public have certainly

an equitable claim to admission, both because the fame of its first inhabitant is a national possession, and because the mansion was a national gift, one of the purposes of which was to be a token of gratitude and glory to the English people themselves. If a man chooses to be illustrious, he is very likely to incur some little inconveniences himself, and entail them on his posterity. Nevertheless, his present Grace of Marlborough absolutely ignores the public claim above suggested, and (with a thrift of which even the hero of Blenheim himself did not set the example) sells tickets admitting six persons at ten shillings; if only one person enters the gate, he must pay for six; and if there are seven in company, two tickets are required to admit them. The attendants, who meet you everywhere in the park and palace, expect fees on their own private account, – their noble master pocketing the ten shillings. But, to be sure, the visitor gets his money's worth, since it buys him the right to speak just as freely of the Duke of Marlborough as if he were the keeper of the Cremorne Gardens.¹

Passing through a gateway on the opposite side of the quadrangle, we had before us the noble classic front of the palace, with its two projecting wings. We ascended the lofty steps of the portal, and were admitted into the entrance-hall, the height of which, from floor to ceiling, is not much less than seventy

¹ The above was written two or three years ago, or more; and the Duke of that day has since transmitted his coronet to his successor, who, we understand, has adopted much more liberal arrangements. There is seldom anything to criticise or complain of, as regards the facility of obtaining admission to interesting private houses in England.

feet, being the entire elevation of the edifice. The hall is lighted by windows in the upper story, and, it being a clear, bright day, was very radiant with lofty sunshine, amid which a swallow was flitting to and fro. The ceiling was painted by Sir James Thornhill in some allegorical design (doubtless commemorative of Marlborough's victories), the purport of which I did not take the trouble to make out, – contenting myself with the general effect, which was most splendidly and effectively ornamental.

We were guided through the show-rooms by a very civil person, who allowed us to take pretty much our own time in looking at the pictures. The collection is exceedingly valuable, – many of these works of Art having been presented to the Great Duke by the crowned heads of England or the Continent. One room was all aglow with pictures by Rubens; and there were works of Raphael, and many other famous painters, any one of which would be sufficient to illustrate the meanest house that might contain it. I remember none of them, however (not being in a picture-seeing mood), so well as Vandyck's large and familiar picture of Charles I. on horseback, with a figure and face of melancholy dignity such as never by any other hand was put on canvas. Yet, on considering this face of Charles (which I find often repeated in half-lengths) and translating it from the ideal into literalism, I doubt whether the unfortunate king was really a handsome or impressive-looking man: a high, thin-ridged nose, a meagre, hatchet face, and reddish hair and beard, – these are the literal facts. It is the painter's art that has thrown such pensive

and shadowy grace around him.

On our passage through this beautiful suite of apartments, we saw, through the vista of open doorways, a boy of ten or twelve years old coming towards us from the farther rooms. He had on a straw hat, a linen sack that had certainly been washed and rewashed for a summer or two, and gray trousers a good deal worn, – a dress, in short, which an American mother in middle station would have thought too shabby for her darling schoolboy's ordinary wear. This urchin's face was rather pale (as those of English children are apt to be, quite as often as our own), but he had pleasant eyes, an intelligent look, and an agreeable boyish manner. It was Lord Sunderland, grandson of the present Duke, and heir – though not, I think, in the direct line – of the blood of the great Marlborough, and of the title and estate.

After passing through the first suite of rooms, we were conducted through a corresponding suite on the opposite side of the entrance-hall. These latter apartments are most richly adorned with tapestries, wrought and presented to the first Duke by a sisterhood of Flemish nuns; they look like great, glowing pictures, and completely cover the walls of the rooms. The designs purport to represent the Duke's battles and sieges; and everywhere we see the hero himself, as large as life, and as gorgeous in scarlet and gold as the holy sisters could make him, with a three-cornered hat and flowing wig, reining in his horse, and extending his leading-staff in the attitude of command. Next to Marlborough, Prince Eugene is the most prominent figure. In

the way of upholstery, there can never have been anything more magnificent than these tapestries; and, considered as works of Art, they have quite as much merit as nine pictures out of ten.

One whole wing of the palace is occupied by the library, a most noble room, with a vast perspective length from end to end. Its atmosphere is brighter and more cheerful than that of most libraries: a wonderful contrast to the old college libraries of Oxford, and perhaps less sombre and suggestive of thoughtfulness than any large library ought to be; inasmuch as so many studious brains as have left their deposit on the shelves cannot have conspired without producing a very serious and ponderous result. Both walls and ceiling are white, and there are elaborate doorways and fireplaces of white marble. The floor is of oak, so highly polished that our feet slipped upon it as if it had been New England ice. At one end of the room stands a statue of Queen Anne in her royal robes, which are so admirably designed and exquisitely wrought that the spectator certainly gets a strong conception of her royal dignity; while the face of the statue, fleshy and feeble, doubtless conveys a suitable idea of her personal character.² The marble of this work, long as it has stood there, is as white as snow just fallen, and must have required most faithful and religious care to keep it so. As for the volumes of the library, they are wired within the cases, and turn their gilded backs upon the visitor, keeping their treasures of wit and wisdom

² In front of St. Paul's there is a statue of Queen Anne, which looks rather more majestic, I doubt not, than that fat old dame ever did. — II. 97.

just as intangible as if still in the unwrought mines of human thought.

I remember nothing else in the palace, except the chapel, to which we were conducted last, and where we saw a splendid monument to the first Duke and Duchess, sculptured by Rysbrach, at the cost, it is said, of forty thousand pounds. The design includes the statues of the deceased dignitaries, and various allegorical flourishes, fantasies, and confusions; and beneath sleep the great Duke and his proud wife, their veritable bones and dust, and probably all the Marlboroughs that have since died. It is not quite a comfortable idea that these mouldy ancestors still inhabit, after their fashion, the house where their successors spend the passing day; but the adulation lavished upon the hero of Blenheim could not have been consummated, unless the palace of his lifetime had become likewise a stately mausoleum over his remains, – and such we felt it all to be, after gazing at his tomb.

The next business was to see the private gardens. An old Scotch under-gardener admitted us and led the way, and seemed to have a fair prospect of earning the fee all by himself; but by and by another respectable Scotchman made his appearance and took us in charge, proving to be the head-gardener in person. He was extremely intelligent and agreeable, talking both scientifically and lovingly about trees and plants, of which there is every variety capable of English cultivation. Positively, the Garden of Eden cannot have been more beautiful than this private

garden of Blenheim. It contains three hundred acres, and by the artful circumlocution of the paths, and the undulations, and the skillfully interposed clumps of trees, is made to appear limitless. The sylvan delights of a whole country are compressed into this space, as whole fields of Persian roses go to the concoction of an ounce of precious attar. The world within that garden-fence is not the same weary and dusty world with which we outside mortals are conversant; it is a finer, lovelier, more harmonious Nature; and the Great Mother lends herself kindly to the gardener's will, knowing that he will make evident the half-obliterated traits of her pristine and ideal beauty, and allow her to take all the credit and praise to herself. I doubt whether there is ever any winter within that precinct, – any clouds, except the fleecy ones of summer. The sunshine that I saw there rests upon my recollection of it as if it were eternal. The lawns and glades are like the memory of places where one has wandered when first in love.

What a good and happy life might be spent in a paradise like this! And yet, at that very moment, the besotted Duke (ah! I have let out a secret which I meant to keep to myself; but the ten shillings must pay for all) was in that very garden (for the guide told us so, and cautioned our young people not to be too uproarious), and, if in a condition for arithmetic, was thinking of nothing nobler than how many ten-shilling tickets had that day been sold. Republican as I am, I should still love to think that noblemen lead noble lives, and that all this stately and beautiful environment may serve to elevate them a little way above the rest

of us. If it fail to do so, the disgrace falls equally upon the whole race of mortals as on themselves; because it proves that no more favorable conditions of existence would eradicate our vices and weaknesses. How sad, if this be so! Even a herd of swine, eating the acorns under those magnificent oaks of Blenheim, would be cleanlier and of better habits than ordinary swine.

Well, all that I have written is pitifully meagre, as a description of Blenheim; and I hate to leave it without some more adequate expression of the noble edifice, with its rich domain, all as I saw them in that beautiful sunshine; for, if a day had been chosen out of a hundred years, it could not have been a finer one. But I must give up the attempt; only further remarking that the finest trees here were cedars, of which I saw one – and there may have been many such – immense in girth, and not less than three centuries old. I likewise saw a vast heap of laurel, two hundred feet in circumference, all growing from one root; and the gardener offered to show us another growth of twice that stupendous size. If the Great Duke himself had been buried in that spot, his heroic heart could not have been the seed of a more plentiful crop of laurels.

We now went back to the Black Bear, and sat down to a cold collation, of which we ate abundantly, and drank (in the good old English fashion) a due proportion of various delightful liquors. A stranger in England, in his rambles to various quarters of the country, may learn little in regard to wines (for the ordinary English taste is simple, though sound, in that particular), but

he makes acquaintance with more varieties of hop and malt liquor than he previously supposed to exist. I remember a sort of foaming stuff, called hop-champagne, which is very vivacious, and appears to be a hybrid between ale and bottled cider. Another excellent tipple for warm weather is concocted by mixing brown-stout or bitter ale with ginger-beer, the foam of which stirs up the heavier liquor from its depths, forming a compound of singular vivacity and sufficient body. But of all things ever brewed from malt (unless it be the Trinity Ale of Cambridge, which I drank long afterwards, and which Barry Cornwall has celebrated in immortal verse), commend me to the Archdeacon, as the Oxford scholars call it, in honor of the jovial dignitary who first taught these erudite worthies how to brew their favorite nectar. John Barleycorn has given his very heart to this admirable liquor; it is a superior kind of ale, the Prince of Ales, with a richer flavor and a mightier spirit than you can find elsewhere in this weary world. Much have we been strengthened and encouraged by the potent blood of the Archdeacon!

A few days after our excursion to Blenheim, the same party set forth, in two flies, on a tour to some other places of interest in the neighborhood of Oxford. It was again a delightful day; and, in truth, every day, of late, had been so pleasant that it seemed as if each must be the very last of such perfect weather; and yet the long succession had given us confidence in as many more to come. The climate of England has been shamefully maligned, its sulkiness and asperities are not nearly so offensive

as Englishmen tell us (their climate being the only attribute of their country which they never overvalue); and the really good summer-weather is the very kindest and sweetest that the world knows.

We first drove to the village of Cumnor, about six miles from Oxford, and alighted at the entrance of the church. Here, while waiting for the keys, we looked at an old wall of the churchyard, piled up of loose gray stones, which are said to have once formed a portion of Cumnor Hall, celebrated in Mickle's ballad and Scott's romance. The hall must have been in very close vicinity to the church, – not more than twenty yards off; and I waded through the long, dewy grass of the churchyard, and tried to peep over the wall, in hopes to discover some tangible and traceable remains of the edifice. But the wall was just too high to be overlooked, and difficult to clamber over without tumbling down some of the stones; so I took the word of one of our party, who had been here before, that there is nothing interesting on the other side. The churchyard is in rather a neglected state, and seems not to have been mown for the benefit of the parson's cow; it contains a good many gravestones, of which I remember only some upright memorials of slate to individuals of the name of Tabbs.

Soon a woman arrived with the key of the church-door, and we entered the simple old edifice, which has the pavement of lettered tombstones, the sturdy pillars and low arches, and other ordinary characteristics of an English country church. One or

two pews, probably those of the gentle folk of the neighborhood, were better furnished than the rest, but all in a modest style. Near the high altar, in the holiest place, there is an oblong, angular, ponderous tomb of blue marble, built against the wall, and surmounted by a carved canopy of the same material; and over the tomb, and beneath the canopy, are two monumental brasses, such as we oftener see inlaid into a church pavement. On these brasses are engraved the figures of a gentleman in armor, and a lady in an antique garb, each about a foot high, devoutly kneeling in prayer; and there is a long Latin inscription likewise cut into the enduring brass, bestowing the highest eulogies on the character of Anthony Forster, who, with his virtuous dame, lies buried beneath this tombstone. His is the knightly figure that kneels above; and if Sir Walter Scott ever saw this tomb, he must have had an even greater than common disbelief in laudatory epitaphs, to venture on depicting Anthony Forster in such hues as blacken him in the romance. For my part, I read the inscription in full faith, and believe the poor deceased gentleman to be a much-wronged individual, with good grounds for bringing an action of slander in the courts above.

But the circumstance, lightly as we treat it, has its serious moral. What nonsense it is, this anxiety, which so worries us about our good fame, or our bad fame, after death! If it were of the slightest real moment, our reputations would have been placed by Providence more in our own power, and less in other people's, than we now find them to be. If poor Anthony Forster

happens to have met Sir Walter in the other world, I doubt whether he has ever thought it worth while to complain of the latter's misrepresentations.

We did not remain long in the church, as it contains nothing else of interest; and, driving through the village, we passed a pretty large and rather antique-looking inn, bearing the sign of the Bear and Ragged Staff. It could not be so old, however, by at least a hundred years, as Giles Gosling's time; nor is there any other object to remind the visitor of the Elizabethan age, unless it be a few ancient cottages, that are perhaps of still earlier date. Cumnor is not nearly so large a village, nor a place of such mark, as one anticipates from its romantic and legendary fame; but, being still inaccessible by railway, it has retained more of a sylvan character than we often find in English country towns. In this retired neighborhood the road is narrow and bordered with grass, and sometimes interrupted by gates; the hedges grow in unpruned luxuriance; there is not that close-shaven neatness and trimness that characterize the ordinary English landscape. The whole scene conveys the idea of seclusion and remoteness. We met no travelers, whether on foot or otherwise.

I cannot very distinctly trace out this day's peregrinations; but, after leaving Cumnor a few miles behind us, I think we came to a ferry over the Thames, where an old woman served as ferryman, and pulled a boat across by means of a rope stretching from shore to shore. Our two vehicles being thus placed on the other side, we resumed our drive, – first glancing, however, at the old woman's

antique cottage, with its stone floor, and the circular settle round the kitchen fireplace, which was quite in the mediæval English style.

We next stopped at Stanton Harcourt, where we were received at the parsonage with a hospitality which we should take delight in describing, if it were allowable to make public acknowledgment of the private and personal kindnesses which we never failed to find ready for our needs. An American in an English house will soon adopt the opinion that the English are the very kindest people on earth, and will retain that idea as long, at least, as he remains on the inner side of the threshold. Their magnetism is of a kind that repels strongly while you keep beyond a certain limit, but attracts as forcibly if you get within the magic line.

It was at this place, if I remember right, that I heard a gentleman ask a friend of mine whether he was the author of "The Red Letter A;" and, after some consideration (for he did not seem to recognize his own book, at first, under this improved title), our countryman responded doubtfully, that he believed so. The gentleman proceeded to inquire whether our friend had spent much time in America, – evidently thinking that he must have been caught young, and have had a tincture of English breeding, at least, if not birth, to speak the language so tolerably, and appear so much like other people. This insular narrowness is exceedingly queer, and of very frequent occurrence, and is quite as much a characteristic of men of education and culture as of

clowns.

Stanton Harcourt is a very curious old place. It was formerly the seat of the ancient family of Harcourt, which now has its principal abode at Nuneham Courtney, a few miles off. The parsonage is a relic of the family mansion, or castle, other portions of which are close at hand; for, across the garden, rise two gray towers, both of them picturesquely venerable, and interesting for more than their antiquity. One of these towers, in its entire capacity, from height to depth, constituted the kitchen of the ancient castle, and is still used for domestic purposes, although it has not, nor ever had, a chimney; or, we might rather say, it is itself one vast chimney, with a hearth of thirty feet square, and a flue and aperture of the same size. There are two huge fireplaces within, and the interior walls of the tower are blackened with the smoke that for centuries used to gush forth from them, and climb upward, seeking an exit through some wide air-holes in the conical roof, full seventy feet above. These lofty openings were capable of being so arranged, with reference to the wind, that the cooks are said to have been seldom troubled by the smoke; and here, no doubt, they were accustomed to roast oxen whole, with as little fuss and ado as a modern cook would roast a fowl. The inside of the tower is very dim and sombre (being nothing but rough stone walls, lighted only from the apertures above mentioned), and has still a pungent odor of smoke and soot, the reminiscence of the fires and feasts of generations that have passed away. Methinks the extremest range

of domestic economy lies between an American cooking-stove and the ancient kitchen, seventy dizzy feet in height and all one fireplace, of Stanton Harcourt.

Now – the place being without a parallel in England, and therefore necessarily beyond the experience of an American – it is somewhat remarkable that, while we stood gazing at this kitchen, I was haunted and perplexed by an idea that somewhere or other I had seen just this strange spectacle before. The height, the blackness, the dismal void, before my eyes, seemed as familiar as the decorous neatness of my grandmother's kitchen; only my unaccountable memory of the scene was lighted up with an image of lurid fires blazing all round the dim interior circuit of the tower. I had never before had so pertinacious an attack, as I could not but suppose it, of that odd state of mind wherein we fitfully and teasingly remember some previous scene or incident, of which the one now passing appears to be but the echo and reduplication. Though the explanation of the mystery did not for some time occur to me, I may as well conclude the matter here. In a letter of Pope's, addressed to the Duke of Buckingham, there is an account of Stanton Harcourt (as I now find, although the name is not mentioned), where he resided while translating a part of the "Iliad." It is one of the most admirable pieces of description in the language, – playful and picturesque, with fine touches of humorous pathos, – and conveys as perfect a picture as ever was drawn of a decayed English country-house; and among other rooms, most of which have since crumbled

down and disappeared, he dashes off the grim aspect of this kitchen, – which, moreover, he peoples with witches, engaging Satan himself as head cook, who stirs the infernal caldrons that seethe and bubble over the fires. This letter, and others relative to his abode here, were very familiar to my earlier reading, and, remaining still fresh at the bottom of my memory, caused the weird and ghostly sensation that came over me on beholding the real spectacle that had formerly been made so vivid to my imagination.

Our next visit was to the church, which stands close by, and is quite as ancient as the remnants of the castle. In a chapel or side aisle, dedicated to the Harcourts, are found some very interesting family monuments, – and among them, recumbent on a tombstone, the figure of an armed knight of the Lancastrian party, who was slain in the Wars of the Roses. His features, dress, and armor are painted in colors, still wonderfully fresh, and there still blazes the symbol of the Red Rose, denoting the faction for which he fought and died. His head rests on a marble or alabaster helmet; and on the tomb lies the veritable helmet, it is to be presumed, which he wore in battle, – a ponderous iron case, with the visor complete, and remnants of the gilding that once covered it. The crest is a large peacock, not of metal, but of wood. Very possibly, this helmet was but an heraldic adornment of his tomb; and, indeed, it seems strange that it has not been stolen before now, especially in Cromwell's time, when knightly tombs were little respected, and when armor was in request. However, it is

needless to dispute with the dead knight about the identity of his iron pot, and we may as well allow it to be the very same that so often gave him the headache in his lifetime. Leaning against the wall, at the foot of the tomb, is the shaft of a spear, with a wofully tattered and utterly faded banner appended to it, – the knightly banner beneath which he marshaled his followers in the field. As it was absolutely falling to pieces, I tore off one little bit, no bigger than a finger-nail, and put it into my waistcoat pocket; but seeking it subsequently, it was not to be found.

On the opposite side of the little chapel, two or three yards from this tomb, is another monument, on which lie, side by side, one of the same knightly race of Harcourts and his lady. The tradition of the family is, that this knight was the standard-bearer of Henry of Richmond in the Battle of Bosworth Field; and a banner, supposed to be the same that he carried, now droops over his effigy. It is just such a colorless silk rag as the one already described. The knight has the order of the Garter on his knee, and the lady wears it on her left arm, – an odd place enough for a garter; but, if worn in its proper locality, it could not be decorously visible. The complete preservation and good condition of these statues, even to the minutest adornment of the sculpture, and their very noses, – the most vulnerable part of a marble man, as of a living one, – are miraculous. Except in Westminster Abbey, among the chapels of the kings, I have seen none so well preserved. Perhaps they owe it to the loyalty of Oxfordshire, diffused throughout its neighborhood by the

influence of the University, during the great Civil War and the rule of the Parliament. It speaks well, too, for the upright and kindly character of this old family, that the peasantry, among whom they had lived for ages, did not desecrate their tombs, when it might have been done with impunity.

There are other and more recent memorials of the Harcourts, one of which is the tomb of the last lord, who died about a hundred years ago. His figure, like those of his ancestors, lies on the top of his tomb, clad, not in armor, but in his robes as a peer. The title is now extinct, but the family survives in a younger branch, and still holds this patrimonial estate, though they have long since quitted it as a residence.

We next went to see the ancient fishponds appertaining to the mansion, and which used to be of vast dietary importance to the family in Catholic times, and when fish was not otherwise attainable. There are two or three, or more, of these reservoirs, one of which is of very respectable size, – large enough, indeed, to be really a picturesque object, with its grass-green borders, and the trees drooping over it, and the towers of the castle and the church reflected within the weed-grown depths of its smooth mirror. A sweet fragrance, as it were, of ancient time and present quiet and seclusion was breathing all around; the sunshine of to-day had a mellow charm of antiquity in its brightness. These ponds are said still to breed abundance of such fish as love deep and quiet waters; but I saw only some minnows, and one or two snakes, which were lying among the weeds on the top of the

water, sunning and bathing themselves at once.

I mentioned that there were two towers remaining of the old castle: the one containing the kitchen we have already visited; the other, still more interesting, is next to be described. It is some seventy feet high, gray and reverend, but in excellent repair, though I could not perceive that anything had been done to renovate it. The basement story was once the family chapel, and is, of course, still a consecrated spot. At one corner of the tower is a circular turret, within which a narrow staircase, with worn steps of stone, winds round and round as it climbs upward, giving access to a chamber on each floor, and finally emerging on the battlemented roof. Ascending this turret stair, and arriving at the third story, we entered a chamber, not large, though occupying the whole area of the tower, and lighted by a window on each side. It was wainscoted from floor to ceiling with dark oak, and had a little fireplace in one of the corners. The window-panes were small and set in lead. The curiosity of this room is, that it was once the residence of Pope, and that he here wrote a considerable part of the translation of Homer, and likewise, no doubt, the admirable letters to which I have referred above. The room once contained a record by himself, scratched with a diamond on one of the window-panes (since removed for safekeeping to Nuneham Courtney, where it was shown me), purporting that he had here finished the fifth book of the "Iliad" on such a day.

A poet has a fragrance about him, such as no other human

being is gifted withal; it is indestructible, and clings forevermore to everything that he has touched. I was not impressed, at Blenheim, with any sense that the mighty Duke still haunted the palace that was created for him; but here, after a century and a half, we are still conscious of the presence of that decrepit little figure of Queen Anne's time, although he was merely a casual guest in the old tower, during one or two summer months. However brief the time and slight the connection, his spirit cannot be exorcised so long as the tower stands. In my mind, moreover, Pope, or any other person with an available claim, is right in adhering to the spot, dead or alive; for I never saw a chamber that I should like better to inhabit, – so comfortably small, in such a safe and inaccessible seclusion, and with a varied landscape from each window. One of them looks upon the church, close at hand, and down into the green churchyard, extending almost to the foot of the tower; the others have views wide and far, over a gently undulating tract of country. If desirous of a loftier elevation, about a dozen more steps of the turret stair will bring the occupant to the summit of the tower, – where Pope used to come, no doubt, in the summer evenings, and peep – poor little shrimp that he was! – through the embrasures of the battlement.

From Stanton Harcourt we drove – I forget how far – to a point where a boat was waiting for us upon the Thames, or some other stream; for I am ashamed to confess my ignorance of the precise geographical whereabouts. We were, at any rate,

some miles above Oxford, and, I should imagine, pretty near one of the sources of England's mighty river. It was little more than wide enough for the boat, with extended oars, to pass, – shallow, too, and bordered with bulrushes and water-weeds, which, in some places, quite overgrew the surface of the river from bank to bank. The shores were flat and meadow-like, and sometimes, the boatman told us, are overflowed by the rise of the stream. The water looked clean and pure, but not particularly transparent, though enough so to show us that the bottom is very much weed-grown; and I was told that the weed is an American production, brought to England with importations of timber, and now threatening to choke up the Thames and other English rivers. I wonder it does not try its obstructive powers upon the Merrimack, the Connecticut, or the Hudson, – not to speak of the St. Lawrence or the Mississippi!

It was an open boat, with cushioned seats astern, comfortably accommodating our party; the day continued sunny and warm, and perfectly still; the boatman, well trained to his business, managed the oars skillfully and vigorously: and we went down the stream quite as swiftly as it was desirable to go, the scene being so pleasant, and the passing hours so thoroughly agreeable. The river grew a little wider and deeper, perhaps, as we glided on, but was still an inconsiderable stream: for it had a good deal more than a hundred miles to meander through before it should bear fleets on its bosom, and reflect palaces and towers and Parliament houses and dingy and sordid piles of various

structure, as it rolled to and fro with the tide, dividing London asunder. Not, in truth, that I ever saw any edifice whatever reflected in its turbid breast, when the sylvan stream, as we beheld it now, is swollen into the Thames at London.

Once, on our voyage, we had to land, while the boatman and some other persons drew our skiff round some rapids, which we could not otherwise have passed; another time, the boat went through a lock. We, meanwhile, stepped ashore to examine the ruins of the old nunnery of Godstowe, where Fair Rosamond secluded herself, after being separated from her royal lover. There is a long line of ruinous wall, and a shattered tower at one of the angles; the whole much ivy-grown, – brimming over, indeed, with clustering ivy, which is rooted inside of the walls. The nunnery is now, I believe, held in lease by the city of Oxford, which has converted its precincts into a barnyard. The gate was under lock and key, so that we could merely look at the outside, and soon resumed our places in the boat.

At three o'clock or thereabouts (or sooner or later, – for I took little heed of time, and only wished that these delightful wanderings might last forever) we reached Folly Bridge, at Oxford. Here we took possession of a spacious barge, with a house in it, and a comfortable dining-room or drawing-room within the house, and a level roof, on which we could sit at ease, or dance if so inclined. These barges are common at Oxford, – some very splendid ones being owned by the students of the different colleges, or by clubs. They are drawn by horses, like

canal-boats; and a horse being attached to our own barge, he trotted off at a reasonable pace, and we slipped through the water behind him, with a gentle and pleasant motion, which, save for the constant vicissitude of cultivated scenery, was like no motion at all. It was life without the trouble of living; nothing was ever more quietly agreeable. In this happy state of mind and body we gazed at Christ Church meadows, as we passed, and at the receding spires and towers of Oxford, and on a good deal of pleasant variety along the banks: young men rowing or fishing; troops of naked boys bathing, as if this were Arcadia, in the simplicity of the Golden Age; country-houses, cottages, water-side inns, all with something fresh about them, as not being sprinkled with the dust of the highway. We were a large party now; for a number of additional guests had joined us at Folly Bridge, and we comprised poets, novelists, scholars, sculptors, painters, architects, men and women of renown, dear friends, genial, outspoken, open-hearted Englishmen, – all voyaging onward together, like the wise ones of Gotham in a bowl. I remember not a single annoyance, except, indeed, that a swarm of wasps came aboard of us and alighted on the head of one of our young gentlemen, attracted by the scent of the pomatum which he had been rubbing into his hair. He was the only victim, and his small trouble the one little flaw in our day's felicity, to put us in mind that we were mortal.

Meanwhile, a table had been laid in the interior of our barge, and spread with cold ham, cold fowl, cold pigeon-pie, cold beef,

and other substantial cheer, such as the English love, and Yankees too, – besides tarts, and cakes, and pears, and plums, – not forgetting, of course, a goodly provision of port, sherry, and champagne, and bitter ale, which is like mother's milk to an Englishman, and soon grows equally acceptable to his American cousin. By the time these matters had been properly attended to, we had arrived at that part of the Thames which passes by Nuneham Courtney, a fine estate belonging to the Harcourts, and the present residence of the family. Here we landed, and, climbing a steep slope from the river-side, paused a moment or two to look at an architectural object, called the Carfax, the purport of which I do not well understand. Thence we proceeded onward, through the loveliest park and woodland scenery I ever saw, and under as beautiful a declining sunshine as heaven ever shed over earth, to the stately mansion-house.

As we here cross a private threshold, it is not allowable to pursue my feeble narrative of this delightful day with the same freedom as heretofore; so, perhaps, I may as well bring it to a close. I may mention, however, that I saw the library, a fine, large apartment, hung round with portraits of eminent literary men, principally of the last century, most of whom were familiar guests of the Harcourts. The house itself is about eighty years old, and is built in the classic style, as if the family had been anxious to diverge as far as possible from the Gothic picturesqueness of their old abode at Stanton Harcourt. The grounds were laid out in part by Capability Brown, and seemed to me even more beautiful

than those of Blenheim. Mason the poet, a friend of the house, gave the design of a portion of the garden. Of the whole place I will not be niggardly of my rude Transatlantic praise, but be bold to say that it appeared to me as perfect as anything earthly can be, – utterly and entirely finished, as if the years and generations had done all that the hearts and minds of the successive owners could contrive for a spot they dearly loved. Such homes as Nuneham Courtney are among the splendid results of long hereditary possession; and we Republicans, whose households melt away like new-fallen snow in a spring morning, must content ourselves with our many counterbalancing advantages, – for this one, so apparently desirable to the far-projecting selfishness of our nature, we are certain never to attain.

It must not be supposed, nevertheless, that Nuneham Courtney is one of the great show-places of England. It is merely a fair specimen of the better class of country-seats, and has a hundred rivals, and many superiors, in the features of beauty, and expansive, manifold, redundant comfort, which most impressed me. A moderate man might be content with such a home, – that is all.

And now I take leave of Oxford without even an attempt to describe it, – there being no literary faculty, attainable or conceivable by me, which can avail to put it adequately, or even tolerably, upon paper. It must remain its own sole expression; and those whose sad fortune it may be never to behold it have no better resource than to dream about gray, weather-stained,

ivy-grown edifices, wrought with quaint Gothic ornament, and standing around grassy quadrangles, where cloistered walks have echoed to the quiet footsteps of twenty generations, – lawns and gardens of luxurious repose, shadowed with canopies of foliage, and lit up with sunny glimpses through archways of great boughs, – spires, towers, and turrets, each with its history and legend, – dimly magnificent chapels, with painted windows of rare beauty and brilliantly diversified hues, creating an atmosphere of richest gloom, – vast college halls, high-windowed, oaken-paneled, and hung round with portraits of the men, in every age, whom the university has nurtured to be illustrious, – long vistas of alcoved libraries, where the wisdom and learned folly of all time is shelved, – kitchens (we throw in this feature by way of ballast, and because it would not be English Oxford without its beef and beer), with huge fireplaces, capable of roasting a hundred joints at once, – and cavernous cellars, where rows of piled-up hogsheads seethe and fume with that mighty malt-liquor which is the true milk of Alma Mater: make all these things vivid in your dream, and you will never know nor believe how inadequate is the result to represent even the merest outside of Oxford.

We feel a genuine reluctance to conclude this article without making our grateful acknowledgments, by name, to a gentleman whose overflowing kindness was the main condition of all our sight-seeings and enjoyments. Delightful as will always be our recollection of Oxford and its neighborhood, we partly suspect

that it owes much of its happy coloring to the genial medium through which the objects were presented to us, – to the kindly magic of a hospitality unsurpassed, within our experience, in the quality of making the guest contented with his host, with himself, and everything about him. He has inseparably mingled his image with our remembrance of the Spires of Oxford.

VIII.

SOME OF THE HAUNTS OF BURNS

We left Carlisle at a little past eleven, and within the half hour were at Gretna Green. Thence we rushed onward into Scotland through a flat and dreary tract of country, consisting mainly of desert and bog, where probably the moss-troopers were accustomed to take refuge after their raids into England. Anon, however, the hills hove themselves up to view, occasionally attaining a height which might almost be called mountainous. In about two hours we reached Dumfries, and alighted at the station there.

Chill as the Scottish summer is reputed to be, we found it an awfully hot day, not a whit less so than the day before; but we sturdily adventured through the burning sunshine up into the town, inquiring our way to the residence of Burns. The street leading from the station is called Shakespeare Street; and at its farther extremity we read "Burns Street" on a corner-house, — the avenue thus designated having been formerly known as "Mill-Hole Brae." It is a vile lane, paved with small, hard stones from side to side, and bordered by cottages or mean houses of whitewashed stone, joining one to another along the whole length of the street. With not a tree, of course, or a blade of grass between the paving-stones, the narrow lane was as hot as

Tophet, and reeked with a genuine Scotch odor, being infested with unwashed children, and altogether in a state of chronic filth; although some women seemed to be hopelessly scrubbing the thresholds of their wretched dwellings. I never saw an outskirts of a town less fit for a poet's residence, or in which it would be more miserable for any man of cleanly predilections to spend his days.

We asked for Burns's dwelling; and a woman pointed across the street to a two-story house, built of stone, and whitewashed, like its neighbors, but perhaps of a little more respectable aspect than most of them, though I hesitate in saying so. It was not a separate structure, but under the same continuous roof with the next. There was an inscription on the door, bearing no reference to Burns, but indicating that the house was now occupied by a ragged or industrial school. On knocking, we were instantly admitted by a servant-girl, who smiled intelligently when we told our errand, and showed us into a low and very plain parlor, not more than twelve or fifteen feet square. A young woman, who seemed to be a teacher in the school, soon appeared, and told us that this had been Burns's usual sitting-room, and that he had written many of his songs here.

She then led us up a narrow staircase into a little bedchamber over the parlor. Connecting with it, there is a very small room, or windowed closet, which Burns used as a study; and the bedchamber itself was the one where he slept in his later lifetime, and in which he died at last. Altogether, it is an exceedingly unsuitable place for a pastoral and rural poet to live or die in, —

even more unsatisfactory than Shakespeare's house, which has a certain homely picturesqueness that contrasts favorably with the suburban sordidness of the abode before us. The narrow lane, the paving-stones, and the contiguity of wretched hovels are depressing to remember; and the steam of them (such is our human weakness) might almost make the poet's memory less fragrant.

As already observed, it was an intolerably hot day. After leaving the house, we found our way into the principal street of the town, which, it may be fair to say, is of very different aspect from the wretched outskirts above described. Entering a hotel (in which, as a Dumfries guide-book assured us, Prince Charles Edward had once spent a night), we rested and refreshed ourselves, and then set forth in quest of the mausoleum of Burns.

Coming to St. Michael's Church, we saw a man digging a grave, and, scrambling out of the hole, he let us into the churchyard, which was crowded full of monuments. Their general shape and construction are peculiar to Scotland, being a perpendicular tablet of marble or other stone, within a framework of the same material, somewhat resembling the frame of a looking-glass; and, all over the churchyard, these sepulchral memorials rise to the height of ten, fifteen, or twenty feet, forming quite an imposing collection of monuments, but inscribed with names of small general significance. It was easy, indeed, to ascertain the rank of those who slept below; for in Scotland it is the custom to put the occupation of the

buried personage (as "Skinner," "Shoemaker," "Flesher") on his tombstone. As another peculiarity, wives are buried under their maiden names, instead of those of their husbands, thus giving a disagreeable impression that the married pair have bidden each other an eternal farewell on the edge of the grave.

There was a foot-path through this crowded churchyard, sufficiently well worn to guide us to the grave of Burns; but a woman followed behind us, who, it appeared kept the key of the mausoleum, and was privileged to show it to strangers. The monument is a sort of Grecian temple, with pilasters and a dome, covering a space of about twenty feet square. It was formerly open to all the inclemencies of the Scotch atmosphere, but is now protected and shut in by large squares of rough glass, each pane being of the size of one whole side of the structure. The woman unlocked the door, and admitted us into the interior. Inlaid into the floor of the mausoleum is the gravestone of Burns, – the very same that was laid over his grave by Jean Armour, before this monument was built. Displayed against the surrounding wall is a marble statue of Burns at the plough, with the Genius of Caledonia summoning the ploughman to turn poet. Methought it was not a very successful piece of work; for the plough was better sculptured than the man, and the man, though heavy and cloddish, was more effective than the goddess. Our guide informed us that an old man of ninety, who knew Burns, certifies this statue to be very like the original.

The bones of the poet, and of Jean Armour, and of some of

their children, lie in the vault over which we stood. Our guide (who was intelligent, in her own plain way, and very agreeable to talk withal) said that the vault was opened about three weeks ago, on occasion of the burial of the eldest son of Burns. The poet's bones were disturbed, and the dry skull, once so brimming over with powerful thought and bright and tender fantasies, was taken away, and kept for several days by a Dumfries doctor. It has since been deposited in a new leaden coffin, and restored to the vault. We learned that there is a surviving daughter of Burns's eldest son, and daughters likewise of the two younger sons, – and, besides these, an illegitimate posterity by the eldest son, who appears to have been of disreputable life in his younger days. He inherited his father's failings, with some faint shadow, I have also understood, of the great qualities which have made the world tender of his father's vices and weaknesses.

We listened readily enough to this paltry gossip, but found that it robbed the poet's memory of some of the reverence that was its due. Indeed, this talk over his grave had very much the same tendency and effect as the home-scene of his life, which we had been visiting just previously. Beholding his poor, mean dwelling and its surroundings, and picturing his outward life and earthly manifestations from these, one does not so much wonder that the people of that day should have failed to recognize all that was admirable and immortal in a disreputable, drunken, shabbily clothed, and shabbily housed man, consorting with associates of damaged character, and, as his only ostensible occupation,

gauging the whiskey, which he too often tasted. Siding with Burns, as we needs must, in his plea against the world, let us try to do the world a little justice too. It is far easier to know and honor a poet when his fame has taken shape in the spotlessness of marble than when the actual man comes staggering before you, besmeared with the sordid stains of his daily life. For my part, I chiefly wonder that his recognition dawned so brightly while he was still living. There must have been something very grand in his immediate presence, some strangely impressive characteristic in his natural behavior, to have caused him to seem like a demigod so soon.

As we went back through the churchyard, we saw a spot where nearly four hundred inhabitants of Dumfries were buried during the cholera year; and also some curious old monuments, with raised letters, the inscriptions on which were not sufficiently legible to induce us to puzzle them out; but, I believe, they mark the resting-places of old Covenanters, some of whom were killed by Claverhouse and his fellow-ruffians.

St. Michael's Church is of red freestone, and was built about a hundred years ago, on an old Catholic foundation. Our guide admitted us into it, and showed us, in the porch, a very pretty little marble figure of a child asleep, with a drapery over the lower part, from beneath which appeared its two baby feet. It was truly a sweet little statue; and the woman told us that it represented a child of the sculptor, and that the baby (here still in its marble infancy) had died more than twenty-six years ago. "Many ladies,"

she said, "especially such as had ever lost a child, had shed tears over it." It was very pleasant to think of the sculptor bestowing the best of his genius and art to re-create his tender child in stone, and to make the representation as soft and sweet as the original; but the conclusion of the story has something that jars with our awakened sensibilities. A gentleman from London had seen the statue, and was so much delighted with it that he bought it of the father-artist, after it had lain above a quarter of a century in the church-porch. So this was not the real, tender image that came out of the father's heart; he had sold that truest one for a hundred guineas, and sculptured this mere copy to replace it. The first figure was entirely naked in its earthly and spiritual innocence. The copy, as I have said above, has a drapery over the lower limbs. But, after all, if we come to the truth of the matter, the sleeping baby may be as fitly repositied in the drawing-room of a connoisseur as in a cold and dreary church-porch.

We went into the church, and found it very plain and naked, without altar decorations, and having its floor quite covered with unsightly wooden pews. The woman led us to a pew, cornering on one of the side aisles, and, telling us that it used to be Burns's family pew, showed us his seat, which is in the corner by the aisle. It is so situated, that a sturdy pillar hid him from the pulpit, and from the minister's eye; "for Robin was no great friends with the ministers," said she. This touch – his seat behind the pillar, and Burns himself nodding in sermon-time, or keenly observant of profane things – brought him before us to the life. In the

corner-seat of the next pew, right before Burns, and not more than two feet off, sat the young lady on whom the poet saw that unmentionable parasite, which he has immortalized in song. We were ungenerous enough to ask the lady's name, but the good woman could not tell it. This was the last thing which we saw in Dumfries worthy of record; and it ought to be noted that our guide refused some money which my companion offered her, because I had already paid her what she deemed sufficient.

At the railway-station we spent more than a weary hour, waiting for the train, which at last came up, and took us to Mauchline. We got into an omnibus, the only conveyance to be had, and drove about a mile to the village, where we established ourselves at the Loudoun Hotel, one of the veriest country inns which we have found in Great Britain. The town of Mauchline, a place more redolent of Burns than almost any other, consists of a street or two of contiguous cottages, mostly whitewashed, and with thatched roofs. It has nothing sylvan or rural in the immediate village, and is as ugly a place as mortal man could contrive to make, or to render uglier through a succession of untidy generations. The fashion of paving the village street, and patching one shabby house on the gable-end of another, quite shuts out all verdure and pleasantness; but, I presume, we are not likely to see a more genuine old Scotch village, such as they used to be in Burns's time, and long before, than this of Mauchline. The church stands about midway up the street, and is built of red freestone, very simple in its architecture, with a square tower

and pinnacles. In this sacred edifice, and its churchyard, was the scene of one of Burns's most characteristic productions, "The Holy Fair."

Almost directly opposite its gate, across the village street, stands Posie Nansie's inn, where the "Jolly Beggars" congregated. The latter is a two-story, red-stone, thatched house, looking old, but by no means venerable, like a drunken patriarch. It has small, old-fashioned windows, and may well have stood for centuries, – though, seventy or eighty years ago, when Burns was conversant with it, I should fancy it might have been something better than a beggars' alehouse. The whole town of Mauchline looks rusty and time-worn, – even the newer houses, of which there are several, being shadowed and darkened by the general aspect of the place. When we arrived, all the wretched little dwellings seemed to have belched forth their inhabitants into the warm summer evening: everybody was chatting with everybody, on the most familiar terms; the bare-legged children gamboled or quarreled uproariously, and came freely, moreover, and looked into the window of our parlor. When we ventured out, we were followed by the gaze of the old town: people standing in their doorways, old women popping their heads from the chamber-windows, and stalwart men – idle on Saturday at e'en, after their week's hard labor – clustering at the street-corners, merely to stare at our unpretending selves. Except in some remote little town of Italy (where, besides, the inhabitants had the intelligible stimulus of beggary), I have never been honored with nearly such

an amount of public notice.

The next forenoon my companion put me to shame by attending church, after vainly exhorting me to do the like; and it being Sacrament Sunday, and my poor friend being wedged into the farther end of a closely filled pew, he was forced to stay through the preaching of four several sermons, and came back perfectly exhausted and desperate. He was somewhat consoled, however, on finding that he had witnessed a spectacle of Scotch manners identical with that of Burns's "Holy Fair" on the very spot where the poet located that immortal description. By way of further conformance to the customs of the country, we ordered a sheep's head and the broth, and did penance accordingly; and at five o'clock we took a fly, and set out for Burns's farm of Moss Giel.

Moss Giel is not more than a mile from Mauchline, and the road extends over a high ridge of land, with a view of far hills and green slopes on either side. Just before we reached the farm, the driver stopped to point out a hawthorn, growing by the wayside, which he said was Burns's "Lousie Thorn;" and I devoutly plucked a branch, although I have really forgotten where or how this illustrious shrub has been celebrated. We then turned into a rude gateway, and almost immediately came to the farm-house of Moss Giel, standing some fifty yards removed from the high-road, behind a tall hedge of hawthorn, and considerably overshadowed by trees. The house is a whitewashed stone cottage, like thousands of others in England and Scotland,

with a thatched roof, on which grass and weeds have intruded a picturesque, though alien, growth. There is a door and one window in front, besides another little window that peeps out among the thatch. Close by the cottage, and extending back at right angles from it, so as to inclose the farm-yard, are two other buildings of the same size, shape, and general appearance as the house: any one of the three looks just as fit for a human habitation as the two others, and all three look still more suitable for donkey-stables and pigsties. As we drove into the farm-yard, bounded on three sides by these three hovels, a large dog began to bark at us; and some women and children made their appearance, but seemed to demur about admitting us, because the master and mistress were very religious people, and had not yet come back from the Sacrament at Mauchline.

However, it would not do to be turned back from the very threshold of Robert Burns; and as the women seemed to be merely straggling visitors, and nobody, at all events, had a right to send us away, we went into the back door, and, turning to the right, entered a kitchen. It showed a deplorable lack of housewifely neatness, and in it there were three or four children, one of whom, a girl eight or nine years old, held a baby in her arms. She proved to be the daughter of the people of the house, and gave us what leave she could to look about us. Thence we stepped across the narrow mid-passage of the cottage into the only other apartment below stairs, a sitting-room, where we found a young man eating bread and cheese. He informed

us that he did not live there, and had only called in to refresh himself on his way home from church. This room, like the kitchen, was a noticeably poor one, and, besides being all that the cottage had to show for a parlor, it was a sleeping-apartment, having two beds, which might be curtained off, on occasion. The young man allowed us liberty (so far as in him lay) to go up stairs. Up we crept, accordingly; and a few steps brought us to the top of the staircase, over the kitchen, where we found the wretchedest little sleeping-chamber in the world, with a sloping roof under the thatch, and two beds spread upon the bare floor. This, most probably, was Burns's chamber; or, perhaps, it may have been that of his mother's servant-maid; and, in either case, this rude floor, at one time or another, must have creaked beneath the poet's midnight tread. On the opposite side of the passage was the door of another attic-chamber, opening which, I saw a considerable number of cheeses on the floor.

The whole house was pervaded with a frowzy smell, and also a dunghill odor; and it is not easy to understand how the atmosphere of such a dwelling can be any more agreeable or salubrious morally than it appeared to be physically. No virgin, surely, could keep a holy awe about her while stowed higgledy-piggledy with coarse-natured rustics into this narrowness and filth. Such a habitation is calculated to make beasts of men and women; and it indicates a degree of barbarism which I did not imagine to exist in Scotland, that a tiller of broad fields, like the farmer of Mauchline, should have his abode in a pigsty. It

is sad to think of anybody – not to say a poet, but any human being – sleeping, eating, thinking, praying, and spending all his home-life in this miserable hovel; but, methinks, I never in the least knew how to estimate the miracle of Burns's genius, nor his heroic merit for being no worse man, until I thus learned the squalid hindrances amid which he developed himself. Space, a free atmosphere, and cleanliness have a vast deal to do with the possibilities of human virtue.

The biographers talk of the farm of Moss Giel as being damp and unwholesome; but I do not see why, outside of the cottage-walls, it should possess so evil a reputation. It occupies a high, broad ridge, enjoying, surely, whatever benefit can come of a breezy site, and sloping far downward before any marshy soil is reached. The high hedge, and the trees that stand beside the cottage, give it a pleasant aspect enough to one who does not know the grimy secrets of the interior; and the summer afternoon was now so bright that I shall remember the scene with a great deal of sunshine over it.

Leaving the cottage, we drove through a field, which the driver told us was that in which Burns turned up the mouse's nest. It is the inclosure nearest to the cottage, and seems now to be a pasture, and a rather remarkably unfertile one. A little farther on, the ground was whitened with an immense number of daisies, – daisies, daisies everywhere; and in answer to my inquiry, the driver said that this was the field where Burns ran his ploughshare over the daisy. If so, the soil seems to have been consecrated to

daisies by the song which he bestowed on that first immortal one. I alighted, and plucked a whole handful of these "wee, modest, crimson-tipped flowers," which will be precious to many friends in our own country as coming from Burns's farm, and being of the same race and lineage as that daisy which he turned into an amaranthine flower while seeming to destroy it.³

From Moss Giel we drove through a variety of pleasant scenes, some of which were familiar to us by their connection with Burns. We skirted, too, along a portion of the estate of Auchinleck, which still belongs to the Boswell family, – the present possessor being Sir James Boswell,⁴ a grandson of Johnson's friend, and son of the Sir Alexander who was killed in a duel. Our driver spoke of Sir James as a kind, free-hearted man, but addicted to horse-races and similar pastimes, and a little too familiar with the wine-cup; so that poor Bozzy's booziness would

³ Southport, *May 10th*. The grass has been green for a month, – indeed, it has never been entirely brown, and now the trees and hedges are beginning to be in foliage. Weeks ago the daisies bloomed, even in the sandy grass-plot bordering on the promenade beneath our front windows; and in the progress of the daisy, and towards its consummation, I saw the propriety of Burns's epithet, "wee, modest, *crimson-tipped* flower," – its little white petals in the bud being fringed all round with crimson, which fades into pure white when the flower blooms. – II. 419.

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appear to have become hereditary in his ancient line. There is no male heir to the estate of Auchinleck. The portion of the lands which we saw is covered with wood and much undermined with rabbit-warrens; nor, though the territory extends over a large number of acres, is the income very considerable.

By and by we came to the spot where Burns saw Miss Alexander, the Lass of Ballochmyle. It was on a bridge, which (or, more probably, a bridge that has succeeded to the old one, and is made of iron) crosses from bank to bank, high in air over a deep gorge of the road; so that the young lady may have appeared to Burns like a creature between earth and sky, and compounded chiefly of celestial elements. But, in honest truth, the great charm of a woman, in Burns's eyes, was always her womanhood, and not the angelic mixture which other poets find in her.

Our driver pointed out the course taken by the Lass of Ballochmyle, through the shrubbery, to a rock on the banks of the Lugar, where it seems to be the tradition that Burns accosted her. The song implies no such interview. Lovers, of whatever condition, high or low, could desire no lovelier scene in which to breathe their vows: the river flowing over its pebbly bed, sometimes gleaming into the sunshine, sometimes hidden deep in verdure, and here and there eddying at the foot of high and precipitous cliffs. This beautiful estate of Ballochmyle is still held by the family of Alexanders, to whom Burns's song has given renown on cheaper terms than any other set of people ever attained it. How slight the tenure seems! A young lady

happened to walk out, one summer afternoon, and crossed the path of a neighboring farmer, who celebrated the little incident in four or five warm, rude, – at least, not refined, though rather ambitious, – and somewhat ploughman-like verses. Burns has written hundreds of better things; but henceforth, for centuries, that maiden has free admittance into the dream-land of Beautiful Women, and she and all her race are famous. I should like to know the present head of the family, and ascertain what value, if any, the members of it put upon the celebrity thus won.

We passed through Catrine, known hereabouts as "the clean village of Scotland." Certainly, as regards the point indicated, it has greatly the advantage of Mauchline, whither we now returned without seeing anything else worth writing about.

There was a rain-storm during the night, and, in the morning, the rusty, old, sloping street of Mauchline was glistening with wet, while frequent showers came spattering down. The intense heat of many days past was exchanged for a chilly atmosphere, much more suitable to a stranger's idea of what Scotch temperature ought to be. We found, after breakfast, that the first train northward had already gone by, and that we must wait till nearly two o'clock for the next. I merely ventured out once, during the forenoon, and took a brief walk through the village, in which I have left little to describe. Its chief business appears to be the manufacture of snuff-boxes. There are perhaps five or six shops, or more, including those licensed to sell only tea and tobacco; the best of them have the characteristics of

village stores in the United States, dealing in a small way with an extensive variety of articles. I peeped into the open gateway of the churchyard, and saw that the ground was absolutely stuffed with dead people, and the surface crowded with gravestones, both perpendicular and horizontal. All Burns's old Mauchline acquaintances are doubtless there, and the Armours among them, except Bonny Jean, who sleeps by her poet's side. The family of Armour is now extinct in Mauchline.

Arriving at the railway-station, we found a tall, elderly, comely gentleman walking to and fro and waiting for the train. He proved to be a Mr. Alexander, — it may fairly be presumed the Alexander of Ballochmyle, a blood relation of the lovely lass. Wonderful efficacy of a poet's verse, that could shed a glory from Long Ago on this old gentleman's white hair! These Alexanders, by the by, are not an old family on the Ballochmyle estate; the father of the lass having made a fortune in trade, and established himself as the first landed proprietor of his name in these parts. The original family was named Whitefoord.

Our ride to Ayr presented nothing very remarkable; and, indeed, a cloudy and rainy day takes the varnish off the scenery, and causes a woful diminution in the beauty and impressiveness of everything we see. Much of our way lay along a flat, sandy level, in a southerly direction. We reached Ayr in the midst of hopeless rain, and drove to the King's Arms Hotel. In the intervals of showers I took peeps at the town, which appeared to have many modern or modern-fronted edifices; although there

are likewise tall, gray, gabled, and quaint-looking houses in the by-streets, here and there, betokening an ancient place. The town lies on both sides of the Ayr, which is here broad and stately, and bordered with dwellings that look from their windows directly down into the passing tide.

I crossed the river by a modern and handsome stone bridge, and recrossed it, at no great distance, by a venerable structure of four gray arches, which must have bestridden the stream ever since the early days of Scottish history. These are the "Two Briggs of Ayr," whose midnight conversation was overheard by Burns, while other auditors were aware only of the rush and rumble of the wintry stream among the arches. The ancient bridge is steep and narrow, and paved like a street, and defended by a parapet of red freestone, except at the two ends, where some mean old shops allow scanty room for the pathway to creep between. Nothing else impressed me hereabouts, unless I mention that, during the rain, the women and girls went about the streets of Ayr barefooted to save their shoes.

The next morning wore a lowering aspect as if it felt itself destined to be one of many consecutive days of storm. After a good Scotch breakfast, however, of fresh herrings and eggs, we took a fly, and started at a little past ten for the banks of the Doon. On our way, at about two miles from Ayr, we drew up at a roadside cottage, on which was an inscription to the effect that Robert Burns was born within its walls. It is now a public house; and, of course, we alighted and entered its little sitting-room,

which, as we at present see it, is a neat apartment with the modern improvement of a ceiling. The walls are much overscribbled with names of visitors, and the wooden door of a cupboard in the wainscot, as well as all the other wood-work of the room, is cut and carved with initial letters. So, likewise, are two tables, which, having received a coat of varnish over the inscriptions, form really curious and interesting articles of furniture. I have seldom (though I do not personally adopt this mode of illustrating my humble name) felt inclined to ridicule the natural impulse of most people thus to record themselves at the shrines of poets and heroes.

On a panel, let into the wall in a corner of the room, is a portrait of Burns, copied from the original picture by Nasmyth. The floor of this apartment is of boards, which are probably a recent substitute for the ordinary flag-stones of a peasant's cottage. There is but one other room pertaining to the genuine birthplace of Robert Burns: it is the kitchen, into which we now went. It has a floor of flag-stones, even ruder than those of Shakespeare's house, – though, perhaps, not so strangely cracked and broken as the latter, over which the hoof of Satan himself might seem to have been trampling. A new window has been opened through the wall, towards the road; but on the opposite side is the little original window, of only four small panes, through which came the first daylight that shone upon the Scottish poet. At the side of the room, opposite the fireplace, is a recess, containing a bed, which can be hidden by curtains. In that

humble nook, of all places in the world, Providence was pleased to deposit the germ of richest human life which mankind then had within its circumference.

These two rooms, as I have said, make up the whole sum and substance of Burns's birthplace: for there were no chambers, nor even attics; and the thatched roof formed the only ceiling of kitchen and sitting-room, the height of which was that of the whole house. The cottage, however, is attached to another edifice of the same size and description, as these little habitations often are; and, moreover, a splendid addition has been made to it, since the poet's renown began to draw visitors to the wayside alehouse. The old woman of the house led us through an entry, and showed a vaulted hall, of no vast dimensions, to be sure, but marvelously large and splendid as compared with what might be anticipated from the outward aspect of the cottage. It contained a bust of Burns, and was hung round with pictures and engravings, principally illustrative of his life and poems. In this part of the house, too, there is a parlor, fragrant with tobacco-smoke; and, no doubt, many a noggin of whiskey is here quaffed to the memory of the bard, who professed to draw so much inspiration from that potent liquor.

We bought some engravings of Kirk Alloway, the Bridge of Doon, and the monument, and gave the old woman a fee besides, and took our leave. A very short drive farther brought us within sight of the monument, and to the hotel, situated close by the entrance of the ornamental grounds within which the former

is inclosed. We rang the bell at the gate of the inclosure, but were forced to wait a considerable time; because the old man, the regular superintendent of the spot, had gone to assist at the laying of the corner-stone of a new kirk. He appeared anon, and admitted us, but immediately hurried away to be present at the concluding ceremonies, leaving us locked up with Burns.

The inclosure around the monument is beautifully laid out as an ornamental garden, and abundantly provided with rare flowers and shrubbery, all tended with loving care. The monument stands on an elevated site, and consists of a massive basement story, three-sided, above which rises a light and elegant Grecian temple, – a mere dome, supported on Corinthian pillars, and open to all the winds. The edifice is beautiful in itself; though I know not what peculiar appropriateness it may have, as the memorial of a Scottish rural poet.

The door of the basement story stood open; and, entering, we saw a bust of Burns in a niche, looking keener, more refined, but not so warm and whole-souled as his pictures usually do. I think the likeness cannot be good. In the centre of the room stood a glass case, in which were repositied the two volumes of the little Pocket Bible that Burns gave to Highland Mary, when they pledged their troth to one another. It is poorly printed on coarse paper. A verse of Scripture referring to the solemnity and awfulness of vows is written within the cover of each volume, in the poet's own hand; and fastened to one of the covers is a lock of Highland Mary's golden hair. This Bible had been carried to

America by one of her relatives, but was sent back to be fitly treasured here.

There is a staircase within the monument, by which we ascended to the top, and had a view of both Briggs of Doon: the scene of Tam O'Shanter's misadventure being close at hand. Descending, we wandered through the inclosed garden, and came to a little building in a corner, on entering which, we found the two statues of Tam and Sutor Wat, – ponderous stonework enough, yet permeated in a remarkable degree with living warmth and jovial hilarity. From this part of the garden, too, we again beheld the old Brigg of Doon, over which Tam galloped in such imminent and awful peril. It is a beautiful object in the landscape, with one high, graceful arch, ivy-grown, and shadowed all over and around with foliage.

When we had waited a good while, the old gardener came, telling us that he had heard an excellent prayer at laying the corner-stone of the new kirk. He now gave us some roses and sweetbrier, and let us out from his pleasant garden. We immediately hastened to Kirk Alloway, which is within two or three minutes' walk of the monument. A few steps ascend from the roadside, through a gate, into the old graveyard, in the midst of which stands the kirk. The edifice is wholly roofless, but the side-walls and gable-ends are quite entire, though portions of them are evidently modern restorations. Never was there a plainer little church, or one with smaller architectural pretensions; no New England meeting-house has

more simplicity in its very self, though poetry and fun have clambered and clustered so wildly over Kirk Alloway that it is difficult to see it as it actually exists. By the by, I do not understand why Satan and an assembly of witches should hold their revels within a consecrated precinct; but the weird scene has so established itself in the world's imaginative faith that it must be accepted as an authentic incident, in spite of rule and reason to the contrary. Possibly, some carnal minister, some priest of pious aspect and hidden infidelity, had dispelled the consecration of the holy edifice by his pretense of prayer, and thus made it the resort of unhappy ghosts and sorcerers and devils.

The interior of the kirk, even now, is applied to quite as impertinent a purpose as when Satan and the witches used it as a dancing-hall; for it is divided in the midst by a wall of stone-masonry, and each compartment has been converted into a family burial-place. The name on one of the monuments is Crawford; the other bore no inscription. It is impossible not to feel that these good people, whoever they may be, had no business to thrust their prosaic bones into a spot that belongs to the world, and where their presence jars with the emotions, be they sad or gay, which the pilgrim brings thither. They shut us out from our own precincts, too, – from that inalienable possession which Burns bestowed in free gift upon mankind, by taking it from the actual earth and annexing it to the domain of imagination. And here these wretched squatters have lain down to their long sleep, after barring each of the two doorways of the

kirk with an iron grate! May their rest be troubled, till they rise and let us in!

Kirk Alloway is inconceivably small, considering how large a space it fills in our imagination before we see it. I paced its length, outside of the wall, and found it only seventeen of my paces, and not more than ten of them in breadth. There seem to have been but very few windows, all of which, if I rightly remember, are now blocked up with mason-work of stone. One mullioned window, tall and narrow, in the eastern gable, might have been seen by Tam O'Shanter, blazing with devilish light, as he approached along the road from Ayr; and there is a small and square one, on the side nearest the road, into which he might have peered, as he sat on horseback. Indeed, I could easily have looked through it, standing on the ground, had not the opening been walled up. There is an odd kind of belfry at the peak of one of the gables, with the small bell still hanging in it. And this is all that I remember of Kirk Alloway, except that the stones of its material are gray and irregular.

The road from Ayr passes Alloway Kirk, and crosses the Doon by a modern bridge, without swerving much from a straight line. To reach the old bridge, it appears to have made a bend, shortly after passing the kirk, and then to have turned sharply towards the river. The new bridge is within a minute's walk of the monument; and we went thither, and leaned over its parapet to admire the beautiful Doon, flowing wildly and sweetly between its deep and wooded banks. I never saw a lovelier scene; although this might

have been even lovelier if a kindly sun had shone upon it. The ivy-grown, ancient bridge, with its high arch, through which we had a picture of the river and the green banks beyond, was absolutely the most picturesque object, in a quiet and gentle way, that ever blessed my eyes. Bonny Doon, with its wooded banks, and the boughs dipping into the water! The memory of them, at this moment, affects me like the song of birds, and Burns crooning some verses, simple and wild, in accordance with their native melody.

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