

The Lie of The Land  
*Notes about Landscapes*

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I WANT to talk about the something which makes the real, individual landscape the landscape one actually sees with the eyes of the body and the eyes of the spirit *the landscape you cannot describe*.

That is the drawback of my subject that it just happens to elude all literary treatment, and yet it must be treated. There is not even a single word or phrase to label it, and I have had to call it, in sheer despair, *the lie of the land* : it is an unnamed mystery into which various things enter, and I feel as if I ought to explain myself by dumb show. It will serve at any rate as an object-lesson in the extreme one-sidedness of language and a protest against human silence about the things it likes best.

Of outdoor things words can of course tell us some important points : colour, for instance, and light, and somewhat of their gradations and relations. And an adjective, a metaphor, may evoke an entire atmospheric effect, paint us a sunset or a star-lit night. But the far subtler and more individual relations of visible line defy expression : no poet or prose writer can give you the tilt of a roof, the undulation of a field, the bend of a road. Yet these are the things in landscape which constitute its individuality and which reach home to our feelings.

For colour and light are variable—nay, more, they are relative. The same tract will be green in connection with one sort of sky, blue with another, and yellow with a third. We may be disappointed when the woods, which we had seen as vague, moss-like blue before the sun had overtopped the hills, become at midday a mere vast lettuce-bed. We should be much more than disappointed, we should doubt of our senses if we found on going to our window that it looked down upon outlines of hills, upon precipices, ledges, knolls, or flat expanses, different from those we had seen the previous day or the previous year. Thus the unvarying items of a landscape happen to be those for which precise words cannot be found. Briefly, we praise colour, but we actually *live* in the indescribable thing which I must call the *lie of the land*. The lie of the land means walking or climbing, shelter or bleakness ; it means the corner where we dread a boring neighbour, the bend round which we have watched some one depart, the stretch of road which seemed to lead us away out of captivity. Yes, *lie of the land* is what has mattered to us since we were children, to our fathers and remotest ancestors ; and its perception, the instinctive preference for one kind rather than another, is among the obscure things inherited with our blood, and making up the stuff of our souls. For how else explain the strange powers which different shapes of the earth's surface have over different individuals ; the sudden pleasure, as of the sight of an old friend, the pang of pathos which we may all receive in a scene which is new, without memories, and so unlike everything familiar as to be almost without associations ?

The *lie of the land* has therefore an importance in art, or if it have not, ought to have, quite independent of pleasantness of line or of anything merely visual. An immense charm consists in the fact that the mind can walk about in a landscape. The delight at the beauty which is seen is heightened by the anticipation of further unseen beauty ; by the sense of exploring the unknown ; and to our present pleasure before a painted landscape is added the

pleasure we have been storing up during years of intercourse, if I may use this word, with so many real ones.

## II

For there is such a thing as intercourse with fields and trees and skies, with the windings of road and water and hedge, in our everyday, ordinary life. And a terrible thing for us all if there were not ; if our lives were not full of such various commerce, of pleasure, curiosity, and gratitude, of kindly introduction of friend by friend, quite apart from the commerce with other human beings. Indeed, one reason why the modern rectangular town (built at one go for the convenience of running omnibuses and suppressing riots) fills our soul with bitterness and dryness, is surely that this ill-conditioned convenient thing can give us only its own poor, paltry presence, introducing our eye and fancy neither to further details of itself, nor to other places and people, past or distant.

Words can just barely indicate the charm of this *other place other time* enriching of the present impression. Words cannot in the least, I think, render that other suggestion contained in *The Lie of the Land*, the suggestion of the possibility of a delightful walk. What walks have we not taken, leaving sacred personages and profane, not to speak of allegoric ones, far behind in the backgrounds of the old Tuscans, Umbrians, and Venetians ! Up Benozzo's hillside woods of cypress and pine, smelling of myrrh and sweet-briar, over Perugino's green rising grounds, towards those slender, scant-leaved trees, straight-stemmed acacias and elms, by the water in the cool, blue evening valley. Best of all, have not Giorgione and Titian, Palma and Bonifazio, and the dear imitative people labelled *Venetian* school, led us between the hedges russet already with the ripening of the season and hour into those fields where the sheep are nibbling, under the twilight of the big brown trees, to where some pale blue alp closes in the slopes and the valleys ?

## III

It is a pity that the landscape painters of our day—I mean those French or French taught, whose methods are really new—tend to neglect *The Lie of the Land*. Some of them, I fear, deliberately avoid it as old-fashioned what they call obvious as interfering with their aim of interesting by the mere power of vision and skill in laying on the paint. Be this as it may, their innovations inevitably lead them away from all research of what we may call *topo-graphical* charm, for what they have added to art is the perfection of very changeable conditions of light and atmosphere, of extremely fleeting accidents of colour. One would indeed be glad to open one's window on the fairyland of iridescent misty capes, of vibrating skies and sparkling seas of Monsieur Claude Monet ; still more to stand at the close of an autumn day watching the light fogs rise along the fields, mingling with delicate pinkish mist of the bare poplar rows against the green of the first sprouts of corn. But I am not sure that the straight line of sea and shore would be interesting at any other moment of the day ; and the poplar rows and cornfields would very likely be drearily dull until sunset. The moment, like Faust's second of perfect bliss, is such as should be made immortal, but the place one would rather not see again. Yet Monsieur Monet is the one of his school who shows most care for the scene he is painting. The others, even the great ones—men like Pissarro and Sisley, who have shown us so many delightful things in the details of even the dull French foliage, even the dull midday sky—the other *modern ones* make one long to pull up their umbrella and easel and carry them on—not very far surely—to some spot where the road made a bend, the embankment had a gap, the water a swirl ; for we would not be so old-fashioned as to request that the country might have a few undulations. ... Of course it was very dull of our ancestors—particularly of Clive Newcome's day always to paint a panorama with whole ranges of

hills, miles of river, and as many cities as possible ; and even our pleasure in Turner's large landscapes is spoilt by their being the sort of thing people would drive for miles or climb for hours to enjoy, what our grandfathers in post-chaises called a *noble fine prospect*. All that had to be got rid of, like the contemporaneous literary descriptions : " A smiling valley proceeded from south-east to north-west ; an amphitheatre of cliffs bounding it on the right hand ; while to the left a magnificent waterfall leapt from a rock three hundred feet in height and expanded into a noble natural basin of granite some fifty yards in diameter," &c. &c. The British classics, thus busy with compass, measuring-rod and level, thus anxious to enable the reader to reconstruct their landscape on paste-board, had no time of course to notice trifling matters : how, for instance,

The woods are round us, heaped and dim ;  
From slab to slab how it slips and springs  
The thread of water, single and slim,  
Through the ravage some torrent brings.

Nor could the panoramic painter of the earlier nineteenth century pay much attention to mere alternations of light while absorbed in his great " Distant View of Jerusalem and Madagascar" ; indeed, he could afford to move off only when it began to rain very hard.

#### IV

The impressionist painters represent the reaction against this dignified and also more stolid school of landscape ; they have seen, or are still seeing, all the things which other men did not see. And here I may remark that one of the most important items of this seeing is exactly the fact that in many cases we can see only very little. The impressionists have been scoffed at for painting rocks which might be chimney-stacks, and flowering hedges which might be foaming brooks ; plains also which might be hills, and *vice versâ*, and described as wretches, disrespectful to natural objects, which, we are told, reveal new beauties at every glance. But is it more respectful to natural objects to put a drawing-screen behind a willow-bush and copy its minutest detail of branch and trunk, than to paint that same willow, a mere mist of glorious orange, as we see it flame against the hillside confusion of mauve, and russet and pinkish sereness ? I am glad to have brought in that word *confusion* : the modern school of landscape has done a great and pious thing in reinstating the complexity, the mystery, the confusion of Nature's effects ; Nature, which differs from the paltry work of man just in this, that she does not thin out, make clear and symmetrical for the easier appreciation of foolish persons, but packs effect upon effect, in space even as in time, one close upon the other, leaf upon leaf, branch upon branch, tree upon tree, colour upon colour, a mystery of beauty wrapped in beauty, without the faintest concern whether it would not be better to say " this is really a river," or, " that is really a tree." " But," answer the critics with much superiority, " art should not be the mere copying of Nature ; surely there is already enough of Nature herself ; art should be the expression of man's delight in Nature's shows." Well, Nature shows a great many things which are not unchanging and not by any means unperplexing ; she shows them at least to those who will see, see what is really there to be seen ; and she will show them, thanks to our brave impressionists, to all men henceforth who have eyes and a heart. And here comes our debt to these great painters : what a number of effects, modest and exquisite, or bizarre and magnificent, they will have taught us to look out for ; what beauty and poetry in humdrum scenery, what perfect loveliness even among sordidness and squalor : tints as of dove's breasts in city mud, enamel splendours in heaps of furnace refuse, mysterious magnificence, visions of Venice at night, of Eblis palace, of I know not what, in wet gaslit nights, in looming lit-up factories. Nay, leaving that alone, since 'tis better, per-

haps, that we should not enjoy anything connected with grime and misery and ugliness—how much have not these men added to the delight of our walks and rides ; revealing to us, among other things, the supreme beauty of winter colouring, the harmony of purple, blue, slate, brown, pink, and russet, of tints and compounds of tints without a name, of bare hedgerows and leafless trees, sere grass and mist-veiled waters ; compared with which spring is but raw, summer dull, and autumn positively ostentatious in her gala suit of tawny and yellow.

Perhaps, indeed, these modern painters have done more for us by the beauty they have taught us to see in Nature than by the beauty they have actually put before us in their pictures ; if I except some winter landscapes of Monet's and the wonderful water-colours of Mr. Brabazon, whose exquisite sense of form and knowledge of drawing have enabled him, in rapidest sketches of rapidly passing effects, to indicate the structure of hills and valleys, the shape of clouds, in the mere wash of colour, even as Nature indicates them herself. With such exceptions as these, and the beautiful mysteries of Mr. Whistler, there is undoubtedly, in recent landscape, a preoccupation of technical methods and an indifference to choice of subject, above all, a degree of insistence on what is *actually seen* which leads one to suspect that the impressionists represent rather a necessary phase in the art, than a definite achievement, in the same manner as the Renaissance painters who gave themselves up to the study of perspective and anatomy. This terrible over-importance of the act of vision is doubtless the preparation for a new kind of landscape, which will employ these arduously acquired facts of colour and light, this restlessly renovated technique, in the service of a new kind of sentiment and imagination, differing from that of previous ages even as the sentiment and imagination of Browning differs from that of his great predecessors. But it is probably necessary that the world at large, as well as the artists, should be familiarised with the new facts, the new methods of impressionism, before such facts and methods can find their significance and achievement ; even as in the Renaissance people had to recognise the realities of perspective and anatomy before they could enjoy an art which attained beauty through this means ; it would have been no use showing Sixtine chapels to the contemporaries of Giotto. There is at present a certain lack of enjoyable quality, a lack of soul appealing to soul, in the new school of landscape. But where there is a faithful, reverent eye, a subtle hand, a soul cannot be far round the corner. And we may hope that, if we be as sincere and willing as ourselves, our Pollaiolos and Mantegnas of the impressionist school, discoverers of new subtleties of colour and light, will be duly succeeded by modern Michelangelos and Titians, who will receive all the science ready for use, and bid it fetch and carry and build new wonderful things for the pleasure of their soul and of ours.

## V

And mentioning Titian, brings to my memory a remark once made to me on one of those washed away, rubbly hills, cypresses and pines holding the earth together, which the old Tuscans drew so very often. The remark, namely, that some of the charm of the old masters' landscapes is due to the very reverse of what sometimes worries one in modern work, to the notion which these backgrounds give at first bits of valley, outlines of hills, distant views of towered villages, of having been done without trouble, almost from memory, till you discover that your Titian has modelled his blue valley into delicate blue ridges ; and your Piero della Francesca indicated the precise structure of his pale, bony mountains. Add to this, to the old men's credit, that, as I said, they knew *the lie of the land*, they gave us landscapes in which our fancy, our memories, could walk.

How large a share such fancy and such memories have in the life of art, people can scarcely realise. Nay, such is the habit of thinking of the picture, statue, or poem, as a com-

plete and vital thing apart from the mind which perceives it, that the expression *life of art* is sure to be interpreted as life of various schools of art : thus, the life of art developed from the type of Phidias to that of Praxiteles, and so forth. But in the broader, truer sense, the life of all art goes on in the mind and heart, not merely of those who make the work, but of those who see and read it. Nay, is not *the* work, the real one, a certain particular state of feeling, a pattern woven of new perceptions and impressions and of old memories and feelings, which the picture, the statue or poem, awakens, different in each different individual ? 'Tis a thought perhaps annoying to those who have slaved seven years over a particular outline of muscles, a particular colour of grass, or the cadence of a particular sentence. What ! all this to be refused finality, to be disintegrated by the feelings and fancies of the man who looks at the picture, or reads the book, heaven knows how carelessly besides ? Well, if not disintegrated, would you prefer it to be unassimilated ? Do you wish your picture, statue or poem to remain whole as you made it ? Place it permanently in front of a mirror ; consign it to the memory of a parrot ; or, if you are musician, sing your song, expression and all, down a phonograph. You cannot get from the poor human soul, that living microcosm of changing impressions, the thorough, wholesale appreciation which you want.

## VI

This same power of sentiment and fancy, that is to say, of association, enables us to carry about, like a verse or a tune, whole mountain ranges, valleys, rivers and lakes, things in appearance the least easy to remove from their place. As some persons are never unattended by a melody ; so others, and among them your humble servant, have always for their thoughts and feelings, an additional background besides the one which happens to be visible behind their head and shoulders. By this means I am usually in two places at a time, sometimes in several very distant ones within a few seconds.

It is extraordinary how much of my soul seems to cling to certain peculiarities of what I have called *lie of the land*, undulations, bends of rivers, straightenings and snakings of road ; how much of one's past life, sensations, hopes, wishes, words, has got entangled in the little familiar sprigs, grasses and moss. The order of time and space is sometimes utterly subverted ; thus, last autumn, in a corner of Argyllshire, I seemed suddenly cut off from everything in the British Isles, and reunited to the life I used to lead hundreds of miles away, years ago in the high Apennines, merely because of the minute starry moss under foot and the bubble of brooks in my ears.

Nay, the power of outdoor things, their mysterious affinities, can change the values even of what has been and what has not been, can make one live for a moment in places which have never existed save in the fancy. Have I not found myself suddenly taken back to certain woods which I loved in my childhood simply because I had halted before a great isolated fir with hanging branches, a single fir shading a circle of soft green turf, and watched the rabbits sitting, like round grey stones suddenly flashing into white tails and movement ? Woods where ? I have not the faintest notion. Perhaps only woods I imagined my father must be shooting in when I was a baby, woods which I made up out of Christmas trees, moss and dead rabbits, woods I had heard of in fairy tales . . .

Such are some of the relations of landscape and sentiments, a correct notion of which is necessary before it is possible to consider the best manner of *representing landscape with words* ; a subject to which none of my readers, I think, nor myself, have at present the smallest desire to pass on.

## On Modern Travelling

### I

THERE is one charming impression peculiar to railway travelling, that of the twilight hour in the train ; but the charm is greater on a short journey, when one is not tired and has not the sense of being uprooted, than on a long one. The movement of the train seems, after sunset, particularly in the South where nightfall is rapid, to take a quality of mystery. It glides through a landscape of which the smaller details are effaced, as are likewise effaced the details of the railway itself. And that rapid gliding brings home to one the instability of the hour, of the changing light, the obliterating form. It makes one feel that everything is, as it were, a mere vision ; bends of poplared river with sunset redness in their grey swirls ; big towered houses of other days ; the spectral white fruit trees in the dark fields ; the pine tops round, separate, yet intangible, against the sky of unearthly blue ; the darkness not descending, as foolish people say it does, from the skies to the earth, but rising slowly from the earth where it has gathered fold upon fold, an emanation thereof, into the sky still pale and luminous, turning its colour to white, its whiteness to grey, till the stars, mere little white specks before, kindle one by one.

Dante, who had travelled so much, and so much against his will, described this hour as turning backwards the longing of the traveller, and making the heart grow soft of them who had that day said farewell to their friends. It is an hour of bitterness, the crueller for mingled sweetness, to the exile ; and in those days when distances were difficult to overcome, every traveller must in a sense have been somewhat of an exile. But to us, who have not necessarily left our friends, who may be returning to them ; to us accustomed to coming and going, to us hurried along in dreary swiftness, it is the hour also when the earth seems full of peace and goodwill ; and our pensiveness is only just sad enough to be sweet, not sad enough to be bitter. For every hamlet we pass seems somehow the place where we ought to tarry for all our days ; every room or kitchen, a red square of light in the dimness with dark figures moving before the window, seems full of people who might be friends ; and the hills we have never beheld before, the bends of rivers, the screen of trees, seem familiar as if we had lived among them in distant days which we think of with longing.

### II

This is the best that can be said, I think, for modern modes of travel. But then, although I have been jolted about a good deal from country to country, and slept in the train on my nurse's knees, and watched all my possessions, from my cardboard donkey and my wax dolls to my manuscripts and proof-sheets, overhauled on custom-house counters—but then, despite all this, I have never made a great journey. I have never been to the United States, nor to Egypt, nor to Russia ; and it may well be that I shall see the Eleusinian gods, Persephone and whoever else imparts knowledge in ghostland, without ever having set foot in Greece. My remarks are therefore meant for the less fortunate freight of railways and steamers ; though do I really envy those who see the wonderful places of the earth before they have dreamed of them, the dreamland of other men revealed to them for the first time in the solid reality of Cook and Gaze ?

I would not for the world be misunderstood ; I have not the faintest prejudice against Gaze or Cook. I fervently desire that these gentlemen may ever quicken trains and cheapen hotels ; I am ready to be jostled in Alpine valleys and Venetian canals by any number of vociferous

tourists, for the sake of the one, schoolmistress, or clerk, or artisan, or curate, who may by this means have reached at last the land east of the sun and west of the moon, the St. Brandan's Isle of his or her longings. What I object to are the well-mannered, well-dressed, often well-informed persons who, having turned Scotland into a sort of Hurlingham, are apparently making Egypt, the Holy Land, Japan, into *succursales* and *dépendances* (I like the good Swiss names evoking couriers and waiters) of their own particularly dull portion of London and Paris and New York.

Less externally presentable certainly, but how much, more really venerable is the mysterious class of dwellers in obscure pensions : curious beings who migrate without perceiving any change of landscape and people, but only change of fare, from the cheap boarding-house in Dresden to the cheap boarding-house in Florence, Prague, Seville, Rouen, or Bruges. It is a class whom one of nature's ingenious provisions, intended doubtless to maintain a balance of inhabited and uninhabited, directs unconsciously, automatically to the great cities of the past rather than to those of the present ; so that they sit in what were once palaces, castles, princely pleasure-houses, discussing over the stony pears and apples the pleasures and draw-backs, the prices and fares, the dark staircase against the Sunday ices, of other boarding-houses in other parts of Europe. A quaint race it is, neither marrying nor giving in marriage, and renewed by natural selection among the poor in purse and poor in spirit ; but among whom the sentimental traveller, did he still exist, might pick up many droll and melancholy and perhaps chivalrous stories.

My main contention then is merely that, before visiting countries and towns in the body, we ought to have visited them in the spirit ; otherwise I fear we might as well sit still at home. I do not mean that we should read about them ; some persons I know affect to extract a kind of pleasure from it ; but to me it seems dull work. One wants to visit unknown lands in company, not with other men's descriptions, but with one's own wishes and fancies. And very curious such wishes and fancies are, or rather the countries and cities they conjure up, having no existence on any part of the earth's surface, but a very vivid one in one's own mind. Surely most of us, arriving in any interesting place, are already furnished with a tolerable picture or plan thereof ; the cathedral on a slant or a rising ground, the streets running uphill or somewhat in a circle, the river here or there, the lie of the land, colour of the houses, nay, the whole complexion of the town, so and so. The reality, so far as my own experience goes, never once tallies with the fancy ; but the town of our building is so compact and clear that it often remains in our memory alongside of the town of stone and brick, only gradually dissolving, and then leaving sometimes airy splendours of itself hanging to the solid structures of its prosaic rival.

Another curious thing to note is how certain real scenes will sometimes get associated in our minds with places we have never beheld, to such a point that the charm of the known is actually enhanced by that of the unknown. I remember a little dell in the High Alps, which, with its huge larches and mountain pines, its tufts of bee-haunted heather and thyme among the mossy boulders, its overlooking peak and glimpses of far-down lakes, became dear to me much less for its own sake than because it always brought to my mind the word *Thrace*, and with it a vague fleeting image of satyrs and mænads, a bar of the music of Orpheus. And less explicable than this, a certain rolling tableland, not more remote than the high road to Rome, used at one time to impress me with a mysterious consciousness of the plains of Central Asia ; a ruined byre, a heap of white-washed stones, among the thistles and stubbles of a Fife hillside, had for me once a fascination due to the sense that it must be like Algeria.

Has any painter ever fixed on canvas such visions, distinct and haunting, of lands he had never seen, Claude or Turner, or the Flemish people who painted the little towered and domed celestial Jerusalem ? I know not. The nearest thing of the kind was a wonderful erection of brown paper and (apparently) ingeniously arranged shavings, built up in rock-like fashion, covered with little green toy-box trees, and dotted here and there with bits of mirror glass and cardboard houses, which once puzzled me considerably in the parlour of a cottage. "Do tell me what that is?" at last rose to my lips. "That," answered my hostess very slowly, "that is a work of my late husband; a representation of the Alps as close as he could imagine them, for he never was abroad." I often think of that man "who never was abroad," and of his representation of the Alps; of the hours of poetic vision, of actual creation perhaps from sheer strength of longing, which resulted in that quaint work of art.

As close as he could imagine them! He had read, then, about the Alps, read perhaps in Byron or some Radcliffian novel on a stall; and he had wondered till the vision had come, ready for pasteboard and toy trees and glue and broken mirror to embody it! And meanwhile I, who am obliged to cross those very Alps twice every year, I try to do so at night, to rumble and rattle up and down their gorges in a sleeping-car! There seems something wrong in this; something wrong in the world's adjustments, not really in me, for I swear it is respect for the Alps which makes me thus avoid their sight.

### III

And here is the moment for stating my plea against our modern, rapid, hurried travelling: there is to decent minds a certain element of humiliation therein, as I suspect there is in every *royal road*. There is something almost superhumanly selfish in this rushing across countries without giving them a thought, indeed with no thoughts in us save of our convenience, inconvenience, food, sleep, weariness. The whole of Central Europe is thus reduced, for our feelings, to an arrangement of buffets and custom-houses, its acres checked off on our sensorium as so many jolts. For it is not often that respectable people spend a couple of days, or even three, so utterly engrossed in themselves, so without intellectual relation or responsibility to their surroundings, living in a moral stratum not above ordinary life, but below it. Perhaps it is this suspending of connection with all interests which makes such travelling restful to very busy persons, and agreeable to very foolish ones. But to decent, active, leisured folk it is, I maintain, humiliating; humiliating to become so much by comparison in one's own consciousness; and I suspect that the vague sense of self-disgust attendant on days thus spent is a sample of the self-disgust we feel very slightly (and ought to feel very strongly) whenever our wretched little self is allowed to occupy the whole stage of our perceptions.

There is in M. Zola's *Bête Humaine* a curious picture of a train, one train after another, full of eager modern life, being whirled from Paris to Havre through the empty fields, before cottages and old-world houses miles remote from any town. But in reality is not the train the empty thing, and are not those solitary houses and pastures that which is filled with life? The Roman express thus rushes to Naples, Egypt, India, the far East, the great Austral islands, cutting in two the cypress avenue of a country house of the Val d'Arno, Neptune with his conch, a huge figure of the seventeenth century, looking on from an artificial grotto. What to him is this miserable little swish past of to-day?

There is only one circumstance when this vacuity, this suspension of all real life, is in its place; when one is hurrying to some dreadful goal, a death-bed or perhaps a fresh-made grave. The soul is precipitated forward to one object, one moment, and cannot exist mean-

while ; *ruit not hora*, but *anima* ; emptiness suits passion and suffering, for they empty out the world.

#### IV

Be this as it may, it will be a great pity if we lose a certain sense of wonder at distance overcome, a certain emotion of change of place. This emotion—paid for no doubt by much impatience and weariness where the plains were wide, the mountains high, or the roads persistently straight—must have been one of the great charms of the old mode of travelling. You savoured the fact of each change in the lie of the land, of each variation in climate and province, the difference between the chestnut and the beech zones, for instance, in the south, of the fir and the larch in the Alps ; the various types of window, roof, chimney, or well, nay, the different fold of the cap or kerchief of the market women. One inn, one square, one town-hall or church, introduced you gradually to its neighbours. We feel this in the talk of old people, those who can remember buying their team at Calais, of elderly ones who chartered their *vetturino* at Marseilles or Nice ; in certain scraps in the novels even of Thackeray, giving the sense of this gradual occupation of the continent by relays. One of Mr. Ruskin's drawings at Oxford evokes it strongly in me. On what railway journey would he have come across that little town of Rheinfelden (where is Rheinfelden ?), would he have wandered round those quaint towered walls, over that bridge, along that grassy walk ?

I can remember, in my childhood, the Alps before they had railways ; the enormous remoteness of Italy, the sense of its lying down there, far, far away in its southern sea ; the immense length of the straight road from Bellinzona to the lake, the endlessness of the winding valleys. Now, as I said in relation to that effigy of the Alps by the man who had never been abroad, I get into my bunk at Milan, and waking up, see in the early morning crispness, the glass-green Reuss tear past, and the petticoated turrets of Lucerne.

Once also (and I hope not once and never again) I made an immense journey through Italy in a pony-cart. We seemed to traverse all countries and climates ; lush, stifling valleys with ripening maize and grapes ; oak-woods where rows of cypress showed roads long gone, and crosses told of murders ; desolate heaths high on hill-tops, and stony gorges full of myrtle ; green irrigated meadows with plashing water-wheels, and grey olive groves ; so that in the evening we felt homesick for that distant, distant morning : yet we had only covered as much ground as from London to Dover ! And how immensely far off from Florence did we not feel when, four hours after leaving its walls, we arrived in utter darkness at the friendly mountain farm, and sat down to supper in the big bare room, where high-backed chairs and the plates above the immense chimney-piece loomed and glimmered in the half-light ; feeling, as if in a dream, the cool night air still in our throats, the jingle of cart-bells and chirp of wayside crickets still in our ears ! Where was Florence then ? As a fact it was just sixteen miles off.

To travel in this way one should, however, as old John Evelyn advises, “ diet with the natives.” Our ancestors (for one takes for granted, of course, that one's ancestors were *milords*) were always plentifully furnished, I observe, with letters of introduction. They were necessary when persons of distinction carried their bedding on mules and rode in coaches escorted by blunderbuses, like John Evelyn himself.

It is this dieting with the natives which brings one fully in contact with a country's reality. At the tables of one's friends, while being strolled through the gardens or driven across country, one learns all about the life, thoughts, feelings of the people ; the very gossip of the

neighbourhood becomes instructive, and you touch the past through traditions of the family. Here the French put up the maypole in 1796 ; there the beautiful abbess met her lover ; that old bowed man was the one who struck the Austrian colonel at Milan before 1859. 'Tis the mode of travelling that constituted the delight and matured the genius of Stendhal, king of cosmopolitans and grand master of the psychologic novel. To my kind friends, wherever I have any, but most perhaps in Northern Italy, is due among other kinds of gratitude, gratitude for having travelled in his way.

## V.

But there is another way of travelling, more suitable methinks to the poet. For what does the poet want with details of reality when he possesses its universal essence, or with local manners and historic tradition, seeing that his work is for all times and all men ?

Mr. Browning, I was told last year by his dear friends at Asolo, first came upon the kingdom of Kate the Queen by accident, perhaps not having heard its name or not remembering it, in the course of a long walking tour from Venice to the Alps. It was the first time he was in Italy, nay, abroad, and he had come from London to Venice by sea. That village of palaces on the hill-top, with the Lombard plain at its feet and the great Alps at its back ; with its legends of the Queen of Cyprus was, therefore, one of the first impressions of mainland Italy which the poet could have received. And one can understand *Pippa Passes* resulting there from, better than from his years of familiarity with Florence. Pippa, Sebald, Ottima, Jules, his bride, the Bishop, the Spy, nay, even Queen Kate and her Page, are all born of that sort of mis-interpretation of places, times, and stories which is so fruitful in poetry, because it means the begetting of things in the image of the poet's own soul, rather than the fashioning them to match something outside it.

Even without being a poet you may profit in an especial manner by travelling in a country where you know no one, provided you have in you that scrap of poetic fibre without which poets and poetry are caviare to you. There is no doubt that wandering about in the haunts of the past undisturbed by the knowledge of the present is marvellously favourable to the historic, the poetical emotion. The American fresh from the States thinks of Johnson and Dickens in Fleet Street ; at Oxford or Cambridge he has raptures (are any raptures like these?) into which, like notes in a chord and overtones in a note, there enters the deliciousness, the poignancy of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Turner.

The Oxford or Cambridge man, on the other hand, will have similar raptures in some boarding-house at Venice or Florence ; raptures rapturous in proportion almost to his ignorance of the language and the people. Do not let us smile, dear friends, who have lived in Rome till you are Romans, dear friends, who are Romans yourselves, at the foreigner with his Baedeker, turning his back to the Colosseum in his anxiety to reach it, and ashamed as well as unable to ask his way. That Goth or Vandal, very likely, is in the act of possessing Rome, of making its wonder and glory his own, consubstantial to his soul ; Rome is his for the moment. It is ours ? Alas !

Nature, Fate, I know not whether the mother or the daughter, they are so like each other, looks with benignity upon these poor ignorant, solitary tourists, and gives them what she denies to those who have more leisure and opportunity. I cannot explain by any other reason a fact which is beyond all possibility of doubt, and patent to the meanest observer, namely, that it is always during our first sojourn in a place, during its earlier part, and more particularly when we are living prosaically at inns and boarding-houses, that something

happens—a procession, a serenade, a street-fight, a fair, or a pilgrimage—which shows the place in a particularly characteristic light, and which never occurs again. The very elements are desired to perform for the benefit of the stranger. I remember a thunderstorm, the second night I was ever at Venice, lighting up St. George's, the Salute, the whole lagoon as I have never seen it since.

I can testify, also, to having seen the Alhambra under snow, a sparkling whiteness lying soft on the myrtle hedges, and the reflection of arches and domes waving, with the drip of melted snow from the roofs, in the long-stagnant tanks. If I lived in Granada, or went back there, should I ever see this wonder again? It was so ordered merely because I had just come, and was lodging at an inn.

Yes, Fate is friendly to those who travel rarely, who go abroad to see abroad, not to be warm or cold, or to meet the people they may meet anywhere else. Honour the tourist; he walks in a halo of romance. The cosmopolitan abroad desists from flannel shirts because he is always at home; and he knows to a nicety hours and places which demand a high hat. But does that compensate?

## VI

There is yet another mystery connected with travelling, but 'tis too subtle almost for words. All I can ask is, do you know what it is to meet, say, in some college room, or on the staircase of an English country house, or even close behind the front door in Bloomsbury, the photo-graph of some Florentine relief or French cathedral, the black, gaunt Piranesi print of some Roman ruin; and to feel suddenly Florence, Rouen, Reims, or Rome, the whole of their presence distilled, as it were, into one essence of emotion?

What does it mean? That in this solid world only delusion is worth having? Nay; but that nothing can come into the presence of that capricious despot, our fancy, which has not dwelt six months and six in the purlieu of its palace, steeped, like the candidates for Ahasuerus's favour, in sweet odours and myrrh.

Limbo, and other essays, to which is now added, Ariadne in Mantua (1908)

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