

# UNREST.

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URAL seclusion—viewed in the concrete—is an unbearable torture to a city man. The environments may be all that are pleasing to the eye, and the sylvan shades prove inviting to the senses, but there is ever present the inevitable fact that the sojourner is cut off from his most intimate associations, which makes his heart long for that intercourse only found in the busy marts of commerce. Wedded to solitude as the days are welded into weeks. Kept in the quiet while the hum of men gathered together comes to him as if he stood in his recognised niche on the Exchange. Sleeping while only the lark's song, and the bleating of the sheep, denote their presence in the meadows. Dreaming of business joys and cares by night, reframing his dreams in the morning dawn. With that gnawing predilection that has its birth in custom he longs with an intense weariness for the hour marked on the timetable that limits his sojourn in the shires. Even sportsmen who pay big rents for moors and fishings are not altogether proof against the mesmeric influences of the city when they find themselves divorced from their London houses. The snow falls very, very softly on the fields. It settles on the stubbles and partly melts, wetting the dry hollow stems. The earth is silent, silent the hill-side. The whole landscape is still. Trees are dark and cold viewed from the window, and nature appears to have slackened its reins for a while. All the strength, energy, and activity of the soil seems subdued and visibly lies dormant. The valley and fields are distinctly silent; so utterly devoid of life that it seems like treading on holy ground to walk along the turnpike. Down the feal dyke a sense of being deserted comes home to the heart when the first snow-flake falls. It falls to mark the turning of the year. It flutters between cloud and earth, and floats soft and feathery before the eye. Down it drops, and the heart too gives of its substance as the earth has already done. One cannot get away from the whiteness that so quietly alters the red and green of the fields. The morning toilet becomes somewhat of a dread when the

snow-flakes cling to the window-sill. It takes the glow of the parlour fire to reassure one that the golden days are not yet passed. People of snow-clad lands do not feel this discomfort. They have no cosy parlour for comparison. But with a sportsman it is otherwise. Seated in his shooting-box, a shiver passes over his body as he notes the first flake dropping outside his window. A day goes by and he is off, dogs and guns, bag and baggage, to the city, where the medley traffic hides the white flakes and kills the cold silence. The sportsman's soul is crushed for the time, for it takes a robust city heart to beat against the storms and solitude of the hills. I am within almost an hour's journey per rail of four cities and many more towns, yet I can live out the days of ice and snow in happy contentment. The pendicles, the farms, the villages, and even the roadways may be covered and anointed by the white-flakes of early winter, but this fact does not debar me from seeking in the year's requiem a pleasure and an abiding profit that holds me firmly to the open fields. The crofter is hid in the deep ravine, mid fir-clad valley and snow-topped mountain. In the wooded hollow the children play, and the chime from the parish church echoes along the water-edge and across the hill. It may be uncongenial work to walk the road through mud and wade almost shoe-deep where the cart-ruts mark the stiff pull of the farm-horses. It may be so. It is so in reality and in sober earnestness. But it all depends on the human mind, how much and how little consideration is to be given to the fact. To one being it will be all but unbearable, to another bearable, and to a third a pleasure. Nature possesses many minor natures, cut up into curious shapes and designs. Every item of human nature works out its path in its own fashion, and carves its own channel to God's acre. The casual visitor or the tourist on a brief holiday finds sermons on rural Scotland at every turn of the road. Unconsciously he listens to the lessons taught by the ploughman, the crofter, and the roadman. There is an inexhaustible mine of ancient and modern story deep in the shires—an unlimited catalogue of plant and animal life to be framed by the naturalist who visits the rural parts at intermittent times. There is the beauty spread out upon the face of the earth—mapped out upon the table of the land. There is the quiet of the dawn, and the still voice that tells of peaceful eventide. Provinces of green and brown, kingdoms of dark woods and crystal streams, pass under the searching eye of the field-glass. The

deeper the mind goes the greater is the depth. On the surface there appears no jar or strife, no pain, no war, no internal struggle. The trout leap in the millpond and the smooth portions of the stream, and the plovers search the sandy banks and muddy islands formed by the spates of years. Partridges, pheasants, hares, rabbits, and other creatures roam within gunshot of the visitor's temporary home. Insects, bats, and birds occupy their respective places on the map of nature, and daily act their part in the arena of the fields. Above, the clouds by day, the stars by night, work mysteriously, beyond the knowledge of the telescope and the human eye and brain that search the heavens. During August and September visitors to the hills see all the colours ever changing, loaded with the life of striving plant and animal. They see them all on the surface, but beneath the tree crests and grass there is a greater life lying undisturbed. The city man has no time to investigate; the sportsman only pauses in his hours of physical labour to mark down a vagrant covey. Over the heads of lovely caterpillars, and through the clumps of wild rasp and beds of cranberries, he crushes towards the goal. Millions of creatures, each in their own peculiar way, are working underfoot. The spiders on the heather, spinning their webs from stem to stem, see their tents torn, limply clinging to the heather-bells.

This failure to observe is by no means confined to the city man and sportsman. Both those men may be endowed with the faculty to observe and study natural objects, but, broadly considered, the majority are minus that spark which lights the flame of pure love and devotion for rural life. If the city man be devoid of true sympathy with the life of the shires, than one might look in confidence to the dwellers scattered over the land. The farmer, crofter, ploughman, gamekeeper, and many others, live and have their being under the open dome of moving clouds. Select any one of those mentioned and hold out the scales. The farmer longs for the city, and envies the rich merchant in his white vest, on which the massive gold is linked together. Yet his youth and days have been of the fields, and he hesitates in his mental selection—only he loves to keep to the old way if he could import the money and the luxury of the city magnate. The crofter knows a friend in town, who, without apparent toil or well-directed energy, has earned a competency, and the crofter secretly worships the hope that at some remote date he will do likewise.

The farmer and the crofter see the cuckoo in the springtime of the year. In the early morning sun the birds fly over the fields, calling loudly as they return once more to their Scottish haunts. At night the weird echo of their notes comes constantly from the spruce fir-woods where they hide. Ferns and firs start life at the keeper's doorstep, and high up the ridges where the whins are beat into pale green by the wintry blasts, and the sheep have stunted the growth of the bushes. Heather alone blooms in the mist and storm around the glens of bracken. The blue hares and the ptarmigan wander across the frail limits of vast estates, and the deer pass from one cairn to another, planting their feet on the land claimed by several lairds. A keeper sees all this daily, and yet his heart goes out to the sights within the walls of the city. The monotonous dwelling within the boundary of his possessions at times depresses him, and the love for human intercourse creates a strong desire to see the busy streets and listen to the murmur of the crowd. So accustomed are the people of the shires to the sights and sounds of the country that they forget to pause and think of the beauties that a city man would admire. They have looked so long in the mirror that the face of nature becomes a recognised allegation of fact and fancy. The influences on the mind and heart take unto themselves shapes that are cold and formal. The stars and the moon come and go with the seasons, but seldom is the brightness of Venus admired in the still hours of the evening. Mars and Jupiter are reproduced in the waters of the reedy dam, and the white ripple of a sailing moorhen across the miniature sea is unheeded. The wonderful collections of wild life in the fields around the farms and crofts that remain unnoticed, undisturbed, and innocently ignored is astonishing. The whole landscape is full of Glory, and yet the great mass of the people only look upon the scenes as

" Red ploughed land,  
O'er which a crow flies heavy in the rain."

In May I was early astir in hopes of seeing the cuckoo *en voyage* northwards. As I waited, a rustic appeared within the hedges and approached. As he passed my garden wicket I accosted him. I queried if he had heard the bird this year, and if he had seen the harbinger of summer. He crosses daily the very hill that harbours a number annually, and I had hopes of gaining some reminiscences of the bird-land he should have been familiar with. For twenty-

six years the man had traversed the same road. He had crossed the bridle-path on the moor, hugged the pine woods on his way to the Hilltown, and rounded the shoulder of the northern hill, through the scattered hamlets at its base. The very flowers might have been fixed upon his memory, the trees, the meadows, and the swamps. Yet those twenty-six years had proved unprofitable in this special direction. He had done his duty and gained his wages, but the love of nature had no abiding place in his heart. Without a sign of regret, but rather a look of pity for me, he confessed he had never seen the bird, but thought perhaps that he heard it once during one of his journeys last year. He was by no means confident, however; but as we spoke a pair came from the lower ground, and the sight seemed to bear sunshine to the hills. I pointed them out against the clear clouds, and he heard them calling, for they were only a short distance overhead and the air was still and the wind hushed. After looking a little time he decided these were not the birds he had heard. In fact, he granted he had never heard, far less seen, the cuckoo before. That man had for a quarter of a century all but lived in the cuckoo-country, and remained in gross ignorance of the bird's presence.

In my young days I hunted through the realms of the insect world. My range did not extend over ten or twelve miles from my home. Within that space I collected the lepidoptera, and reared the caterpillars of the rarer species. I did it in my leisure hours—almost alone and untutored. There was practically no one to guide me in my studies, and even my collections were judged to be Indian specimens by most of the intelligent citizens of my limited world. There was only one man who understood my mission, and he was the last individual I would have taken kindly to in my despised hobby. That man was a commercial magnate, and a person of high social position. I was catching insects by his garden hedge late one evening, and he accosted me and discoursed agreeably on the elevating influences of my pursuits. He even used the net, and was anxious to learn the names and life histories of the winged creatures we secured. I left the vicinity of his mansion healthier in heart than I had been for years. That same evening a policeman (lately from the rural parts) stopped me in my operations, and I verily believe does not know yet what my pursuit meant. Here was a man of city training, and whose whole life had been given over to the claims of the marts of the world,

who in the corner of his heart found a place for the perhaps minor but no less interesting pursuits of our nature. On the other hand, a country-man, whose early days—even to manhood—had been spent in the haunts and dwelling-places of the insects, knew neither my calling nor the names of the victims I secured.

Almost a year ago I had the honour of a visit from a Scot who had been divorced from his native land for over forty years. He came to me with the request that I would go over the ground he loved so much in boyhood. I acquiesced willingly, and we had a four hours' stroll round the village, along the burnside, and over the cairn. Returning towards evening, he confidently remarked that he could realise the loveliness of the scenes we had passed through, but altogether failed to notice the profusion of animated life I so often mentioned. He wanted to get nearer to nature, and suspected I used a microscope and a binocular in my wanderings. This discouraged me somewhat, for I had accepted his wayside remarks as visible and inward signs of his appreciation. I could give no satisfactory reply, nor explain away the impotency of the position. To me the birds and insects, the herbs of the fields, the cattle on the pastures, and the homes from which the blue smoke trailed in the warm noon sun—all and more than all was present, gathered round my feet, and as I walked the land seemed clothed with a garment of many living colours. Since then that four hours' walk has appeared in print, and my friend presented with a copy. His acknowledgment indicated he would prefer in future to read in place of walking in search of nature's secrets.

The innate gift of assimilation appears absent in many people. They may open the book and read, and may even be diligent students, and yet the want of that power annuls the growth of the seed which is sound in itself, although it never blooms nor flowers in the sunlight. It is not mere inattention, but rather a cold indifference. It is not that lethargic spirit that creeps over the moral powers, and forces its tendrils round the human heart. It is the indifference bred in the bone of the cottar, and which permeates the arteries of the man on the pavement. The instinctive love for nature is paralysed, and the eyes while open are blind. Left in their own respective positions they turn their eyes and their minds with a calm intuition towards their callings, and forget and indeed dislike too much of that loveliness that knows not gold. It is seldom a crofter is a botanist, although he digs his

bread at first hand from the field roots. I have more faith in a village cobbler or a blacksmith as members of science circles. Dick, Edwards, and Duncan lived hard to enjoy the sweets of liberty of mind and body. They came out from their duties as boys from schoolroom to playground. They worked on the dull side, but lived in the sun. In such men there is an individuality that stamps them true readers of their earthly mission. They are distinguished by their neglect of questionable pleasures and passions, and their elevation above the cupidity of commercial intrigue. Labour, love, and light are their gods.

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