THE LITERATURE OF LANDSCAPE.

By Robert Anderson.

The works devoted to the description of scenery are not very numerous—always excepting, of course, works of a guide-book order—and the reason for their comparative paucity is not far to seek. The appreciation of scenery, especially scenery in its grander and awe-inspiring forms—the scenery of mountains—is of quite modern growth. There is, indeed, a general consensus of opinion that this appreciation only dates from the early years of the nineteenth century, and is almost wholly attributable to the poetry of Wordsworth and the poems and novels of Sir Walter Scott. Wordsworth revealed the beauties of the English Lake district, and taught us to realise the true character and import of the varied manifestations of Nature.

> He laid us as we lay at birth
> On the cool flowery lap of earth,
> Smiles broke from us and we had ease;
> The hills were round us, and the breeze
> Went o'er the sunlit fields again;
> Our foreheads felt the wind and rain.

Scott invested the Scottish Highlands with the magic charm of romance, and his scenic pictures entirely dispelled the notion that had theretofore prevailed that Scotland was a wild, barren, gloomy country. Dr. Johnson, for instance, travelling through some of the finest scenery in Western Inverness-shire, declared himself "astonished and repelled by this wide extent of hopeless sterility." "The appearance," he added, "is that of matter incapable of form or usefulness, dismissed by nature from her care and disinherited of her favours, left in its original elemental state, or quickened only by one sullen power of useless vegetation."

The delineation of landscape, so conspicuously initiated by Sir Walter Scott, has become a favourite device of modern novelists. William Black was in a way famous for his word-

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pictures of "Hebridean sunsets and opalescent seas." The scenery of Wessex is depicted with remarkable fidelity and in a most graphic style by Thomas Hardy. Blackmore has vividly portrayed Exmoor for us, just as Eden Phillpotts is portraying Dartmoor to-day; and the novels of "Lucas Malet" abound in animated descriptions of woodlands and rural landscapes. But landscape is gradually acquiring a literature of its own—in other words, books are being written with the sole purpose of describing scenery. Probably Ruskin set the example in those magnificent "purple patches" of his in "Modern Painters," in which he extolled the beauty and grandeur of mountains; and the "exploitation" of the Alps and of other mountain ranges since his time has led to the publication of many works, partly descriptive of the ascents made, partly descriptive of the natural features observed. The advance in geological science, too, has been the means of adding to landscape literature, for some of our latter-day geologists take more note of scenic features than did their predecessors, and happily are much more disposed to present the results of their investigations with literary effectiveness.

One of the most interesting of recent additions to what we have ventured to term the literature of landscape is Sir Archibald Geikie's "Landscape in History."* Those who are familiar with the author's "Scenery of Scotland" will need no assurance of Sir Archibald's competence to deal with such a subject and to render his exposition attractive. His authority as a geologist is unquestioned, but he also possesses the faculty of clear and vigorous expression. He has been aptly described as "one of those rare men of science who possess imagination and a pleasant literary style," and both qualities are well exhibited in this work. One-half of it—the only portion with which we propose to concern ourselves—deals with "Scenery in its geological relations and in its influence on human progress." The theme is a large one—a

***Landscape in History* and other Essays. By Sir Archibald Geikie, D.C.L., F.R.S. London : Macmillan and Co., Limited.

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little ambitious, perhaps; but it is worked out skilfully, the extensive knowledge of the author forming an admirable basis for his conclusions. "The surface of every country," says Sir Archibald Geikie, "is like a palimpsest which has been written over again and again in different centuries." From a study of this "palimpsest," the most obvious deduction is that topographical conditions have produced "a series of influences which have unquestionably played a large part in the successive stages of human development." This deduction may be taken as the keynote of the portion of the book dealing with scenery.

It consists of the substance of four addresses. The first is titled "Landscape in History." Its basal proposition is that the landscapes of a country—the form, height, and trend of its mountain-ranges, the position and extent of its plains and valleys, and so on—"all these and other aspects of the scenery of the land have contributed their share to the moulding of national history and character." To follow the argument in detail is beyond our space, but the general conclusion may be quoted—

There can be no doubt that the larger features of the landscape of Britain have mainly determined the distribution of the several tribes of mankind out of which the present population of our islands has grown. It is hardly less obvious that the same features have continued during the times of history to influence the development and progress of these tribes. The Gael who long ages ago was pushed by the Briton into the mountain fastnesses of the North was left there to maintain, until only a few generations ago, his primitive habits as hunter and warrior, cattle-dealer and free-booter. While he remained comparatively unprogressive, the Norsemen, Danes, and Saxons, who took possession of the lowlands that lay between his glens and the sea, were able to advance in agriculture upon richer soil and in a less inhospitable climate, and to crowd the land with their homesteads, farms, villages, towns, and seaports. So, too, the Welshman, pushed in turn into his hills by successive Teutonic swarms from the other side of the North Sea, has preserved his pristine language, and with it much of that individuality of character which has kept him from cordially amalgamating with the invaders. And thus while the original Celtic people, restricted to less ample territories and less fertile land, have to a large extent retained the holdings and habits of their ancestors, building comparatively few towns, and engaging in few crafts, save farming and stock-raising, the Teutonic tribes, possessing themselves of the broad cultivated lowlands,

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and the great repositories of coal and iron, have thrown across the islands a network of thoroughfares, have scattered everywhere villages and towns, have built many great cities, have developed the industrial resources of the land, and have mainly contributed to the commercial supremacy of the Empire.

The second address—"Landscape and Imagination"—deals with the various interpretations of nature and natural scenery that have been current at different times. Primitive myth and legend afford many illustrations of the way in which the physical aspects of the land impress their character on the religious beliefs and superstitions of a people. By the Greeks the mountain-tops were regarded as the abode of the gods and the Titans; the tortuous courses of rivers were attributed to fabulous performances by the respective river-gods; volcanoes represented the gaspings of imprisoned monsters. The Teutonic myths and superstitions centred round giants, who were supposed to have a fondness for stones and rocks, and to have had much to do with altering the external aspects of nature. The pagan ideas of gods and giants were slowly exterminated by Christianity, only to be replaced by the assignment of a supernatural origin for striking natural features. In Catholic countries these were attributed to the Virgin and the saints; in our own country the Evil One generally got the credit—or the blame—

In Britain, and especially in Scotland, the devil of the Christian faith appears to have in large measure supplanted the warlocks and the carlines of the earlier beliefs, or at least to have worked in league with them as their chief. All over the country "devil's punch bowls," "devil's cauldrons," "devil's bridges," and other names mark how his prowess has been invoked to account for natural features which in those days were deemed to require some more than ordinary agency for their production.

Geological investigation has, of course, furnished the correct interpretation of the earth's surface, but it has still, occasionally, to encounter and overcome popular or traditional theories. This leads Sir Archibald Geikie to discuss how far the discoveries of science have affected the relation of scenery to the imagination. He maintains that "in dissipating the popular misconceptions which have grown up around the

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question of the origin of scenery, science has put in their place a series of views of nature which appeal infinitely more to the imagination than anything which they supplant." The proposition is a little startling, and can hardly be accepted in its entirety without serious qualification; but Sir Archibald himself, at any rate, supplies a series of views which are marked by graphic description of the natural features presented, and by imaginative insight into the process by which these features were gradually produced. He takes "the man of literature" in fancy to the summit of Slieve League, and supposes him to demand what there is of note in the landscape observable therefrom which he, ignorant of science, misses. The answer of the geologist is simple. He is able to conjure up the working of the forces that have sculptured the whole landscape; to picture coal-fields spreading far and wide over the hills of Donegal; and to realise that the "woes of Ireland may be traced back to a very early time, when not even the most ardent patriot can lay blame on the invading Saxon.* Similar imaginative

* Mr. Alexander Mackie, of the Albyn Place School, Aberdeen, in his interesting little volume on "Nature Knowledge in Modern Poetry," cites, as showing Tennyson's fine geological instinct and knowledge, the two well-known stanzas in "In Memoriam" describing the changes that the earth's surface has undergone—the constant disintegration of the solid land, and the equally constant building up that follows—

> There rolls the deep where grew the tree,
> O earth what changes hast thou seen!
> There, where the long street roars, hath been
> The stillness of the central sea.
>
> The hills are shadows, and they flow
> From form to form, and nothing stands;
> They melt like mist, the solid lands,
> Like clouds they shape themselves and go.

Mr. Mackie adds—"This reads almost like a gloss upon a passage in Sir Archibald Geikie's recent work, 'Landscape in History'—a passage in which he tells how he 'found the splintered slabs of stone [on the wind-swept summit of Slieve League in Donegal] to be full of stems of fossil trees. Here, two thousand feet above the sea, lay a cake of the carboniferous rocks called mill-stone grit. This little remnant on the highest ground of the district demonstrated that a sheet of mill-stone grit once stretched over that remote part of the island, and, may be, extended much farther westward over tracts where the Atlantic now rolls.'"

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operations are executed with a landscape in the Isle of Wight, and with one at Loch Maree. The description of the latter may be quoted as an excellent illustration of Sir Archibald Geikie's felicitous style—

Let me conduct the reader in imagination to the far north-west of Scotland and place him on the craggy slopes above the upper end of Loch Maree as the sun, after a day of autumnal storm, is descending towards the distant Hebrides in a glory of crimson, green, and gold. Hardly anywhere within the compass of our islands can a landscape be beheld so varied in form and colour, so abounding in all that is noblest and fairest in our mountain scenery. To the right rises the huge mass of Slioch, catching on his terraced shoulders the full glow of sunset, and wreathing his summit with folds of delicate rose-coloured cloud. To the left, above the purple shadows that are now gathering round their base, tower the white crags and crest of Ben Eay, rising clear and sharp against the western sky. Down the centre, between these two giant buttresses, lies Loch Maree—the noblest sheet of water in the Scottish Highlands—now ablaze with the light of the sinking sun. Headland behind headland, and islet after islet rise as bars of deep violet out of that sea of gold. Yonder a group of pines, relics of the old Caledonian forest, stand boldly above the rocky knolls. Around us the naked rock undulates in endless bosses, dotted with boulders or half-buried in the deep heather that flames out with yet richer crimson in the ruddy light filling all the valley. Overhead, the banded cliffs of Craig Roy, draped with waterfalls and wet with the rains of the earlier part of the day, glow in the varying tints of sunset. We hear the scream of the eagles that still nest in these inaccessible crags; the hoarse outcry of the heron comes up from the lake; the whirr of the black-cock re-echoes down the hill-side. It might seem as if we were here out of sight and hearing of man, save that now and then the low of cattle, driven home to their stalls, falls faintly on the ear from the distant hamlet, which is fading into the gathering twilight of the glen.

The special geological feature of the landscape, which gives the scientist with imagination "the pull" over the mere literary man without the science, lies in the three distinct forms of rock which enter into the composition of the landscape, and thus record "the successive and early chapters in the long history by which the topography of the Scottish Highlands has been brought into its existing form"—

We can in imagination clothe the landscape with its ancient pine-forests, through which the early Celtic colonists hunted the urus,

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the wild boar, the brown bear, and the reindeer. We then fill up the valley with the stately glacier which once stretched along its hollow and went out to sea. We can dimly conceive the passage of the long ages of persistent decay by which mountain and glen, corry and cliff were carved into the forms which now so delight our eye.

Allusion was made in the "Journal" to one of the addresses—"Landscape and Literature"—at the time of its delivery, and an exceedingly apposite quotation was given.* This address is very much an amplification of the thesis in the two that precede it, supplemented by the argument that if, during the later mental development of a people, the human imagination continued to be stimulated by the more impressive features of the outer world, "such potent causes would more or less make themselves felt in the growth of a national literature." Beginning first with the "placid scenery" of the lowlands, both of England and of Scotland, Sir Archibald Geikie shows how it inspired the writings of Cowper, Thomson, and Burns. Burns's descriptions of Nature, however—though accurate and characteristic—are singularly limited; they are mainly confined to rivers and streams, "banks and braes"—the sea is seldom mentioned, mountains never. As Sir Archibald well puts it, "his pictures are exquisite foregrounds, with seldom any distinct distance." The "uplands" or border country materially influenced the Border minstrelsy; and the scenery of the Highlands was first revealed to the modern world by the "Poems of Ossian," and then more fully by Sir Walter Scott, a similar service for the English lake district being rendered by Wordsworth. It was reserved for Tennyson, says Sir Archibald Geikie, to descry something of the wealth of new interest which "the landscape derives from a knowledge of the history of its several parts," and herein "remains a boundless field for some future poetic seer"—

The terrestrial revolutions of which each hill and dale is a witness; the contrasts presented between the present aspect and past history of every crag and peak; the slow, silent sculpturing that has carved out all this marvellous array of mountain-forms—appeal vividly to the imagination, and furnish themes that well deserve poetic treatment. That they will be seized upon by some Wordsworth of the future,

* See "C. C. J.", II., 317.

I cannot doubt. The bond between landscape and literature will thus be drawn closer than ever. Men will be taught that beneath and behind all the outward beauty of our lowlands, our uplands, and our highlands there lies an inner history which, when revealed, will give to that beauty a fuller significance and an added charm.

The remaining address, "The Origin of the Scenery of the British Islands," is purely geological, and need not detain us, not being pertinent to the subject of this article. Let us turn, therefore, for a moment, to another recent—and really very notable—contribution to the literature of landscape—Mr. James Outram's "In the Heart of the Canadian Rockies."* Mr. Outram—who ought really to be styled "Rev.", for he is a clergyman—has, by the way, a north-country connection. He is a grandson of the famous Sir James Outram, and his mother was a daughter of the late Mr. Patrick Davidson of Inchmarlo. Having collapsed from overwork, he was driven to the mountain heights for mental rest and physical recuperation. He chose the region of the Canadian Rocky Mountains, spent a part of three summers there, and acquired "an intimate acquaintance with almost all of the loftiest mountains and most lovely scenery along the chain of the Divide, from Mount Assiniboine to Mount Columbia, the highest peak in the Dominion as yet conquered by the mountaineer." He was the first to stand on the topmost pinnacle of Mount Assiniboine, "the Matterhorn of North America;"† and he made the first ascent of eighteen other mountains, ranging in height from 10,100 feet to 12,500 feet. Of these ascents he furnishes most graphic and thrilling accounts, with which are incorporated no less enthralling descriptions of the magnificent spectacles witnessed from such tremendous heights.

Mr. Outram has a keen eye for the scenic and the picturesque, and considerable facility in describing what he sees, combined with a quick perception and appreciation of the majestic and

* *In the Heart of the Canadian Rockies.* By James Outram. London: Macmillan & Co., Limited.

† See "Mount Assiniboine" in "C. C. J.", V., 18; see also "C. C. J.", IV., 308.

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sublime. In many instances, however, the story of the ascent monopolises his attention to the sacrifice of "description," except by way of a generalised passage, summing up the features of a view in a few words. Here, for example, is how he depicts the view from the summit of Mount Temple—

> The panorama is a truly glorious one, and as the climb is by no means difficult, it affords one of the best opportunities for the ordinary mortal to indulge in the sublime experience of looking down upon a world where myriads of peaks, far-reaching valleys, countless glaciers, streams and lakes go to make up a vast, bewildering whole, that voices with its thousand tongues the praise of Him who made it all, and speaks to us in tones that surely must uplift our souls and bring them into closer touch with the Creator.

But the book is not all about mountain-climbing and its toils, its difficulties and dangers, and its ultimate rewards in magnificent prospects and grand views. Mr. Outram has much to tell—and tells it charmingly—of the scenery of the Rocky Mountain region—of the valleys and lakes, as well as of snow ridges and glaciers. Even at the risk of unduly extending the length of this article, we are tempted to quote his description of Lake Louise, near Laggan on the Canadian Pacific Railway, the lake h ving been named after the Princess Louise when the Marquis of Lorne was Governor-General of the Dominion—

> As a gem of composition and of colouring it is perhaps unrivalled anywhere. To those who have not seen it, words must fail to conjure up the glories of that
>
> Haunted lake, among the pine-clad mountains,
> Forever smiling upward to the skies.
>
> A master's hand indeed has painted all its beauties ; the turquoise surface, quivering with fleeting ripples, beyond the flower-strewn sweep of grassy shore ; the darkening mass of tapering spruce and pine trees, mantling heavily the swiftly rising slopes, that culminate in rugged steeps and beetling precipices, soaring aloft into the sun-kissed air on either side ; and there beyond the painted portals of the narrowing valley, rich with the hues of royal purple and of sunset reds, the enraptured gaze is lifted to a climax of superb effects, as the black walls of Mount Lefroy, surmounted by their dazzling canopy of hanging glaciers, and the wide gable-sweep of Mount Victoria, resplendent with its spotless covering of eternal snow, crown the matchless scene. The azure dome of heaven, flecked with bright, fleecy clouds like angels wings, completes the picture.

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One of Mr. Outram's most sensational and thrilling narratives is that of the ascent—or, rather, the descent—of Mount Bryce (named after the President of the Cairngorm Club)*, he and his guide "descending practically in the dark a cliff which we had deemed so difficult by daylight as almost to be deterred from undertaking it at all" —

> It will be long before I lose the recollection of those seventy feet of cliff. Drawn out for one long hour of concentrated tension were the successive experiences of helpless groping in the dark depths for something to rest a foot upon, of blind search all over the chilled rocky surface for a knob or tiny crack where the numbed fingers might find another hold, of agonising doubt as to their stability when found, of eerie thrill and sickening sensation when the long-sought support crumbled beneath the stress and hurtled downward into the blackness of space, whilst the hollow reverberations of its fall re-echoed through the silence.

Mention should not be omitted of the interesting fact that included in the series of reprints in Messrs. Dent's "Everyman's Library" is a volume embracing the first part of Professor Tyndall's "Glaciers of the Alps" and his "Mountaineering in 1861."† These two works have passed into the classics of mountaineering literature, and their reproduction in a shilling volume is a testimony to their worth as well as to the judgment and enterprise of the publishers. The volume contains an introduction by Lord Avebury (Sir John Lubbock), who in the summer of 1861 spent a short holiday in Switzerland with Huxley and Tyndall, and again in 1865 spent a fortnight at Zermatt with Tyndall just after the terrible catastrophe on the Matterhorn. Lord Avebury only expresses a generally-accepted opinion when he says that Tyndall's descriptions of Alpine scenery contain many passages of vivid description and remarkable literary beauty, and that "among those who have described the splendid natural phenomena of the Alps and of the

* See "Mount Bryce" in "C. C. J.", IV., 238.

† *The Glaciers of the Alps and Mountaineering in* 1861. By John Tyndall. (Everyman's Library). London : J. M. Dent & Co.

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mountain heights with both imagination and science. Tyndall stands in the front rank."

Messrs. Black's series of "beautiful books" could not have been complete without a volume on "The Alps."* To many people, doubtless, its chief attraction lies in the splendid illustrations, of which there are no fewer than seventy; but the work, none the less, is a sensible addition to the literature of landscape. Sir Martin Conway is one of the most distinguished of contemporary workers in that limited field. So far as mountains are concerned, it may be said of him that he has gone everywhere and seen everything—and also described it, and described it vividly. He has ranged over the Himalayas and the Andes, and "done" Aconcagua and the Arctic glaciers of Spitzbergen, and he has given us books about them all. He has traversed the Alps "from end to end," and duly recounted his experiences and observations; and he was undoubtedly the most capable man to furnish the literary setting to Mr. McCormick's pictures. It is almost supererogatory to add that he has executed the task with all the vigour and vivacity that characterise his books of travel. Two chapters may be specially commended—"How to See Mountains," and "How Mountains are Made."

After the above article was in type, two books appeared that might have been appropriately included. One is "Months at the Lakes"—the English Lakes, that is—by Canon Rawnsley. A critic has said that "throughout the whole book there breathes the atmosphere of the hills and dales that speaks of a love for the subject, and which it is given to few to express so thoroughly." It is thus that the Canon describes "the purple and gold" of March—

> For never are the contrasts of greys and greens so sure to bring the purples of the woodland into prominence. Dim purple of oak, dark purple of alder, rich purple of birch and sweet gale. . . .

* *The Alps.* Described by W. Martin Conway. Painted by A. D. McCormick. London: Adam and Charles Black.

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Then, again, far off, the hills are purple blue, so purple blue that the great billows of cloud that are laid upon them seem almost to become, by reflection, purple-blue themselves. The vast stretches of what, last month, were rain-blanched miles of mountain grass and rushes upon the higher moors or fell tops, take on in March a golden stain, which in the level sun of morn and evening burns like amber, while in the plantation the larches become squirrel colour—lucent pyramids of feathery gold. . . .

The other book is "Rock Climbing in North Wales," by George and Ashley Abraham, though the work is perhaps more noticeable for its remarkably fine photographs.

Mention should also be made of an article, "In the Heart of the Coolins," in the June number of *Blackwood's Magazine*, although it is more descriptive of climbs than of scenery. Still, there is a very vivid account of a "most uncompromising gale" experienced on the top of the Inaccessible Pinnacle—"the whole rock shook with the violence of the storm . . . the whole world seeming to sway and echo in some fantastic movement." And here, at any rate, is the sound reflection of an accurate observer—"The essence of Skye climbing is the extraordinary feeling of space, of endless waters, and illimitable fields of air, and man himself set on a small rock looking out at immensity."

To the June number of *Chambers's Journal* Rev. Archibald G. Robertson, B.D., contributes an article "Alpine Mountaineering In Scotland;" but it is little more than an account of the facilities for climbing in a country which has no fewer than 283 separate hills over 3000 feet high, eight of them being over 4000 feet—

On the majority of these there is splendid Alpine climbing to be had in winter, but especially in spring. Our Highland hills in spring are just like the Swiss Alps, covered with snow, their north and north-east sides seamed in ice-gullies and snow-couloirs, and to climb them requires the same skill and the same tools, and you encounter much the same difficulties as in the Alps.

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