THE

Cairngorm Club Journal.

Vol. IX. JULY, 1918. No 51.

THE MOUNTAINS IN LITERATURE—II.

By John Clarke.

The development of the modern feeling for mountains may be said to have begun with Rousseau and to have culminated in Wordsworth. A few dates will render the connection more evident, and will at the same time serve to show the rapidity of the change in sentiment. "The New Heloïse" was published in 1761. Rousseau died in 1778: his "Confessions" appeared postumously in 1782. Wordsworth was born in 1770, and published his first work in 1793. He was deeply influenced by the French Revolution, of which Rousseau's works were one of the chief causes. "The Excursion" appeared in 1814. The change of attitude was thus effected in a marvellously short time. From the first proclamation of the evangel to its complete acceptance is but half a century. The eighteenth century is characterised by a great upheaval in every department of thought. Its keynote is iconoclasm, or, to alter the metaphor, the old bottles could no longer contain the new wine. Old foundations were being scrapped, and if a new world was not immediately created from the remnants of the old, at any rate essential preparation was being made for the more constructive activities of the nineteenth century.

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FROM ROUSSEAU TO WORDSWORTH.

Two main sentiments seem to have animated Rousseau in his attitude toward Nature. One was his hatred of cities and all that they stood for; the other, his love of liberty. He was the natural man alike in his strength and his weakness. His golden age lay in the unsophisticated past,

> When wild in woods the noble savage ran.

"Good-bye, Paris! We are in quest of love, happiness, innocence. We shall never be far enough from you." Keats, "the English bee [which] sucked the honey and rejected the poison of Rousseau" has expressed the sentiment in a form that mountain-lovers have made their own:—

> To one who has been long in city pent,
> 'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
> And open face of heaven—to breathe a prayer
> Full in the smile of the blue firmament.

Byron, too, could say:—

> High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
> Of human cities torture.

Under the spell of books like "The New Heloïse," as H. G. Graham says in his "Rousseau" (Foreign Classics for English Readers), "people became artificially natural and ostentatiously simple;" though it may be hoped that they have now got past the artificiality and ostentation. The intensity of the passion for the open has greatly increased in this industrial age. Factories, foundries, and—must we add?—slums have rendered city life many times more intolerable than as Rousseau knew it. The rush "back to the country" may one day become as violent as that into the city has now for long been. We are re-discovering the meaning and charm of the open life, even amid the horrors of trench warfare. Now, the country is, *par excellence*, the mountains: whatever else of scene or occupation Nature may afford, the mountains must always be supreme.

With Rousseau, again, liberty was a consuming passion, one of the most deep-seated and genuine traits in his

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versatile and elusive character. He may, as Lowell remarks, have seen in Nature, as Byron did, a reflection of himself, of his own wayward and ungovernable moods. But he saw much more. The beauties of Alpine scenery, in Graham's words (*o.c.*, 121), "instead of merely echoing his melancholy moods . . . raised him far above them all." As Rousseau himself tells us:—

It seems as if, being lifted above all the haunts of men, we had left every low, earthly feeling behind, and that, as we approach the ethereal regions, the soul imbibes something of their eternal purity. . . . In short, there is something magical in these mountainous prospects which ravishes both senses and mind: one forgets everything, one forgets one's self.

On the other hand, Byron could never "lose [his] own wretched identity in avalanche, torrent, glacier, forest or cloud: they never for a moment lightened the weight upon [his] heart." It was in something like Rousseau's spirit that Wordsworth felt himself affected by "that harmony which he found between the heart of man and nature."

In the sea and mountain we find the closest analogies to the restlessness, independence, and rebellion against restraint which have given birth to democracy. Rousseau was the sincere and determined foe to oppression. The solvent of his and similar ideas loosened such of the feudal bonds as still existed in the eighteenth century and gave birth to the French Revolution and the French Republic. The echo of the sentiments in Wordsworth is so familiar as hardly to bear repetition:—

Two voices are there; one is of the Sea,
One of the Mountains; each a mighty voice:
In both from age to age thou didst rejoice,
They were thy chosen music, Liberty!

Similarly Byron:—

Where rose the mountains, there to him were friends;
Where rolled the ocean, thereon was his home.

In becoming the pioneer of the movement "Back to Nature," Rousseau was probably not so much a solitary voice crying in the wilderness as an exponent of the spirit of his age. The time was ripe for emancipation from the dead medieval creeds and formulæ. He was

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the first to interpret the aspirations of the day, and to give articulate expression to what lay deep in men's minds, still dormant but ready to break forth if once it could find utterance. His lead evoked an immediate response, and thus not many decades had passed before the Romantic reaction was in full swing. Thomas Davidson, in his chapter on the subject in his "Rousseau" (Great Educators series) says:—

> Under the influence of Rousseau, the poets of Great Britain broke away from the monotonous aphoristic stiltedness of Pope and his school, and returned to "Nature" and simplicity. Burns, whose debt to Rousseau was very great, and Lady Nairne led the way. They were followed by Keats, Shelley, and Byron; Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth; Leigh Hunt and the Brownings; Carlyle and Ruskin; Clough and Tennyson; Morris and Swinburne; Dickens and Thackeray; George Eliot and Mrs. Ward. On the other side of the Atlantic they were followed by Longfellow and Lowell; Whittier and Emerson. Apart from American differences, the last is the most loyal disciple that Rousseau ever had (230-1).

WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE.

With the opening of the nineteenth century we are still at the very beginning of our subject. For it is in the writers, particularly the poets, of this century that we are to trace the growing interest in mountains, and the endless trains of thought and sentiment that they have suggested or inspired. But Davidson, by some strange oversight, has omitted from his list one of the greatest of these names—his countryman, Sir Walter Scott, the very prince of romancists.

Cowper, writing in 1785, has nothing more appreciative to say on the subject than that

> Mountains interposed make enemies of nations who had else
> Like kindred drops been mingled into one.

A dozen years earlier, Johnson had asserted that "a tract, intersected by many ridges of mountains, naturally divides its inhabitants into petty nations, which are made by a thousand causes enemies to each other." The consequences we need not stay to discuss. Mountaineers for Johnson have a poor character, perhaps because he could never forget that his typical moun-

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taineers dwelt in the Highlands of Scotland! From Cowper to Coleridge is an interval of but seventeen years. The French Revolution had come, if not quite gone. How great a change had come over men's minds may be judged by comparison. Though the allusion in "The Task" (1785) just quoted is merely incidental, the "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni" (1802) is none the less striking in its altered tone and spirit. The scene in its grandeur and sublimity—"sovran BLANC," the "silent sea of pines," the "dread and silent Mount," the "five wild torrents"—is but the background to the praise and adoration which spring up unbidden and irrepressible in the poet's heart:—

> Awake, my soul! not only passive praise
> Thou owest! not alone these swelling tears,
> Mute thanks and secret ecstasy! Awake
> Voice of sweet song! Awake, my heart, awake
> Green vales and icy cliffs all join my Hymn.
> . . . .
> Entranced in prayer
> I worshipped the Invisible alone.

The culmination is reached in the union of Earth and Heaven:—

> Thou kingly spirit throned among the hills
> . . . .
> tell yon rising Sun
> Earth, with her thousand voices, praises GOD.

Wordsworth is a well of mountain and other nature lore. "The Excursion," with "The Prelude," must be studied in detail in order to appreciate the influence of mountain scenes and scenery in developing the poet's mind and in inspiring his thought. One of the earliest moulding forces was subservience

> To presences of God's mysterious power
> Made manifest in Nature's sovereignty
> . . . .
> And mountain liberty.

Up to the age of twenty-two man occupied in his scheme of things a position subordinate to nature:—

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Her visible forms
And viewless agencies : a passion, she,
A rapture often, and immediate love
Ever at hand.

As he says elsewhere :—

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion ; the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite.

Wallace and his deeds had been one of his themes of meditation :—

They had remained
To people the sharp rocks and river banks,
Her natural sanctuaries, with a local soul
Of independence and stern liberty.

"Our loved Helvellyn . . . our own domestic mountain," Skiddaw, and the hills of Scotland are among the commonest objects of his notice. A higher note than the biographical or topographical is struck in passages like these :—

Beneath stern mountains many a soft vale lies,
And lofty springs give birth to lowly streams.

Even the motion of an Angel's wing
Would interrupt the intense tranquillity
Of silent hills, and more than silent sky.

The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.

The voice
Was Nature's, uttered from her Alpine throne :
"Your impious work forbear : perish what may,
Let this one temple last, be this one spot
Of earth devoted to eternity."

Nature's self which is the breath of God,
Or His pure Word by miracle revealed.

SIR WALTER SCOTT—THE MOUNTAINS OF SCOTLAND.

The main interest of Scotchmen is in the mountains of Scotland. If little can be said of them here in detail,

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the loss is the less since the sources of information are open to all. Professor Veitch, in his admirable book, "The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry," has traced the causes of the general movement with a completeness and an enthusiasm that leave but scant gleanings for workers who come after him. Mountains are, of course, only one factor in nature, and their treatment by Veitch is, to some extent, incidental. But, even with this qualification, one cannot do better than commend the study of his two volumes to all who wish to pursue the subject for themselves.

Scott is the first of our mountain poets. If we miss the sympathetic insight and the direct fellowship with the mountain spirit that Wordsworth and, to some extent, Byron display, there are compensations in the vigour and variety of his descriptions, not to say in their closeness to ourselves and our surroundings. His vein may to our day savour a little too strongly of the heroic, his language sound high-pitched, but he has at bottom a true love of mountains; add to which, he combines place with incident, scene with historic event, so realistically that patriotism is enlisted on the side of romance. "The Lady of the Lake," "The Lord of the Isles," and "Marmion" furnish abundant illustration. A few items, taken almost at random, will serve as examples:—

On high Benmore green mosses grow,
And heath-bells bud in deep Glencroe,
And copse on Cruchan-Ben:
But here—above, around, below,
On mountain or in glen,
Nor tree, nor shrub, nor plant, nor flower,
Nor aught of vegetative power,
The weary eye may ken.
For all is rocks at random thrown,

Black waves, bare crags, and banks of stone.

. . . .

Huge terraces of granite black
Afforded rude and cumber'd track;
For from the mountain hoar,
Hurl'd headlong in some night of fear,

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When yell'd the wolf and fled the deer,
 Loose crags had toppled o'er;
And some, chance-poised and balanced, lay,
So that a stripling arm might sway
 A mass no host could raise.

Oft on the trampling band from crown
Of some tall cliff, the deer look'd down.

But ever and anon between
Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green.

The evening mists, with ceaseless change
Now clothed the mountains' lofty range,
 Now left their foreheads bare,
And round the skirts their mantle furl'd.

The dell upon the mountain crest
Yawn'd like a gash on warrior's breast.

The rocky summit, split and rent,
Form'd turret, dome, or battlement,
Or seem'd fantastically set
With cupola or minaret.

 Mountains, that like giants stand,
To sentinel enchanted land.

. . . .

Crags, knolls, and mounds, confusedly hurl'd,
The fragments of an earlier world;

. . . .

While on the north, through middle air,
Ben-An heaved high his forehead bare.

The last extract is a portion of the description of the Trossachs, on which Ruskin remarks:—"And all that the nineteenth century conceived of wise and right to do with this piece of mountain inheritance was to thrust the nose of a steamer into it, plank its blaeberries over with a platform, and drive the populace headlong past it as fast as they can scuffle." (See Veitch's comments, *o.c.*, II., 206 ff.)

In the "mighty cliffs" Scott makes one of his heroes read a moral:—

May they not mark a Monarch's fate,—
Raised high 'mid storms of strife and state,
Beyond life's lowlier pleasures placed,
His soul a rock, his heart a waste?

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Goldsmith's image is more pleasing, though no doubt the object of his simile was different :—

> Eternal sunshine settles on his head.

Byron, as the lover of freedom, is the poet of the sea, but only to less degree of the mountains. In "Manfred," "Childe Harold," and elsewhere, he reveals not merely accurate knowledge and love of mountains, but a certain yearning and wistfulness after his native hills which at once arrests and touches us.

> He who first met the Highlands' swelling blue
> Will love each peak that shows a kindred hue,
> Hail in each crag a friend's familiar face
> And clasp the mountain in his mind's embrace.
> Long have I roamed through lands which are not mine,
> Adored the Alp and loved the Appenine,
> . . . .
> But 'twas not all long ages' lore, nor all
> *Their* nature held me in their thrilling thrall;
> The infant rapture still survived the boy,
> And Loch-na-gar with Ida look'd o'er Troy.

Long years before, he had celebrated the tempests, echoes, and steep frowning glories of our domestic mountain, and formed a truer estimate of the rural beauties of England than some of his predecessors :—

> England ! thy beauties are tame and domestic
> To one who has roved on the mountains afar.

James Beattie derives special interest from his local associations. "There can be no question," says Veitch, "of the ardour, candour, and purity of the mind of Beattie, and of its deep and wide sensibility to the aspects of nature in its manifold forms. It is, indeed, the history of a poetic imagination nursed in the scenes of his native Kincardineshire, mingled with the lights reflected from Spenser and Thomson." He quotes from "The Minstrel" :—

> And oft the craggy cliff he loved to climb,
> When all in mist the world below was lost.
> What dreadful pleasure ! there to stand sublime,
> Like shipwrecked mariner on desert coast,
> And view th' enormous waste of vapour, tossed
> In billows, lengthening to th' horizon round,

Now scooped in gulfs, with mountains now embossed !
And hear the voice of mirth and song rebound,
Flocks, herds, and waterfalls, along the hoar profound !

THE LITERATURE OF CLIMBING.

The literature of climbing has not yet been mentioned. This, in a mountaineering journal, may look like the play without Hamlet. "The literature of mountaineers," Mr. Lunn tells us ("Exploration of the Alps"), "is not as fine as the literature of mountain lovers." The implied contrast is suggestive. To most of us love of the mountains is the ruling passion. It is because we love them that we desire to climb them and make their nearer and more intimate acquaintance. It has been asserted that every view in them worth having can be got from the level, but we take leave to doubt the statement. At the same time, when the mere climbing feat occupies the foreground, the interest becomes centred in other aspects than the romantic or the picturesque. The language of climbing becomes as technical as that of an engineering journal. Even in Tyndall the pure scientist and the maker or breaker of records are so combined that we may doubt whether his work, interesting and exhilarating as it often is, is entitled to be ranked as ideal literature. Ruskin dismisses the gymnastic feats of the climber with the contemptuous remark—"The Alps themselves, which your own poets used to love so reverently, you look upon as soaped poles in a bear-garden, which you set yourselves to climb and slide down again with shrieks of delight. When you are past shrieking, having no articulate voice to say you are glad, you rush home red with cutaneous eruptions of conceit." (Lunn, *o.c.*, 221). Leslie Stephen, Tyndall, and Whymper are all well worth reading ; and no doubt many others of the climbing fraternity fall under the same category. Mountains have, in fact, so many aspects and so much to reveal that we may well be grateful even to those whose prime interest is in engineering routes and overcoming difficulties of ascent.

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THE MOODS AND LESSONS OF THE HILLS.

Literature has thus much to reveal for our instruction and our enjoyment. We have inherited from it a rich legacy, and our age is privileged beyond its predecessors in possessing so many clues and guides to the significance of mountains and mountain scenery. To the ancients mountains were obstructions and sources of danger or damage. They were barren and refused cultivation. The men of our day can recognise that the soil we till has in large measure been a gift from the mountain; from their treasures we derive the golden harvest. If they are places of storm, they also shelter and protect the lands they bound. If they separate nations, they also form natural boundaries and prevent quarrels. We see in them the symbol of endurance and the emblem of liberty. From the crowded fetid city we turn to the hills for health, for relaxation, and for delight. The breath of man is fatal to his fellows; the air of the mountains is the very breath of heaven. The solitude of the hills is deep almost as life; yet there is society where none intrudes. On the hill-top we reach a new standpoint and obtain a new perspective. The littlenesses of life shrink to their true proportion. We begin better to see and know ourselves. The mountain becomes a friend, yet a friend who resents excessive liberties, whose moods and even whims must be studied. His brow may become suddenly clouded, and we forbear to invite confidences for the present. Another time he is all smiles, takes us joyfully upon his shoulders, and admits us unreservedly to his treasures and his secrets. He raises us above the world and above ourselves, where each of us may profit by the experience according to his strength and his wisdom. Be we poet or artist, minister or doctor, teacher or schoolboy, engineer or husbandman, the everlasting hills have their blessings and their lessons for us. Their moods are as variable and as unaccountable as our own; we are not always able to interpret them, and we gladly resort to the seers, the dreamers, and even the mere explorers, whose insight is

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more penetrating and whose revelation is more profound.

This is the great service literature in all the wealth and fulness of its compass can perform. The chief sources have incidentally appeared. Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Scott, Byron take precedence. But Davidson's whole list may be drawn upon, to which are to be added many names from Veitch. Nor should Stevenson be omitted though he is mentioned by neither. Than Ruskin perhaps no writer in verse or prose has entered more fully into the spirit of the mountains, giving us eyes to see something of the visions of wonder and beauty and glory that were vouchsafed to himself. His two great chapters, "The Mountain Gloom" and "The Mountain Glory," present a summary of all that is most striking and impressive in his work. The following extracts from the latter chapter may form a fitting epilogue:—

> The mountains of the earth are its natural cathedrals, or natural altars, overlaid with gold, and bright with broidered work of flowers, and with their clouds resting on them as the smoke of a continual sacrifice.

Of Moses on Nebo, he says:—

> Not strange to his feet, though forty years unknown, the roughness of the bare mountain-path, as he climbed from ledge to ledge of Abarim; not strange to his aged eyes the scattered clusters of the mountain herbage, and the broken shadows of the cliffs, indented far across the silence and uninhabited ravines; scenes such as those among which, with none, as now, beside him but God, he had led his flocks so often.

Of a greater than Moses:—

> Nor, perhaps, should we have unprofitably entered into the mind of the earlier ages, if among our other thoughts, as we watch the chains of the snowy mountains rise on the horizon, we should sometimes admit the memory of the hour in which their Creator, among their solitudes, entered on His travail for the salvation of our race; and indulge the dream, that as the flaming and trembling mountains of the earth seem to be the monuments of the manifesting of his terror on Sinai,—these pure and white hills, near to the heaven, and sources of all good to the earth, are the appointed memorials of that Light of His Mercy that fell, snow-like, on the Mount of Transfiguration.

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