



SKETCHING FROM NATURE.

FEW pastimes are properly pastimes, or in any sense truly amusing amusements, which do not comprise hard work—a paradox which is illustrated by almost every out-door sport, by Alpine-climbing, and above all by sketching from Nature. To the outsider it may seem the most peaceful of pursuits: the smiling landscape, the serene sky, seem to eyes unaccustomed to note their infinite, unresting, and hourly changes the quietest of “sitters;” but landscape-painters tell us that the weariest model in the most difficult of attitudes is quieter than a shadow, that the most playful child is stabler than a cloud. Nature will not *pose*; the fixed gaze of a thousand eyes cannot disconcert her wild and simple ways, and in that unconsciousness of hers lurks the charm which is worth long labour and long patience. If the artist finds beauty all but inimitable in a commonplace face marred by the degeneracy of the world, what secrets of loveliness are discoverable in the always young, innocent, and primeval Nature! But for such discoveries she must be followed, waited upon, watched for.

These are the noble difficulties; the ignoble are innumerable. Foremost come the crowds of village children, for whom, whether they are silent little English urchins, or broad-headed white-haired Germans, or intelligent little French people in sabots, or gamesome Italian youngsters airily clad, the sketcher from Nature has an irresistible attraction. Some little ways they all have in common; for some half-hour or so, for instance, they are silently absorbed in watching the drawing, but after this they need the occasional solace of taking each other by the hair, or they retire to wrestle and scramble together in the dust, with smothered chuckles, after which they return, to press closer and closer on the artist, whose threats soon cease to impress the acute little creatures. The young Teutons on the banks of the Rhine are perhaps the most stolidly persistent persecutors to be met with through a long course of sketching from Nature. Germany enforces compulsory education very thoroughly, so that certain hours of the day bring a perfect respite; but, school-hours over, the whole infant population of Boppard, or Bingen, or St. Goar will find the artist out, each urchin armed with satchel and slate, and each tanned brown by the sun, which has bleached out the little original colour of his flaxen hair. The children of all other nationalities are more manageable and more shy than these embryo heroes of some future Sadowa or Sedan. The little Tuscans have often a kind of princely courtesy; but in Italy it is fatal to be betrayed into laughing at a child's antics; emulous of the honour of amusing the stranger, twenty children will repeat the trick with the most deliberate and wearisome persistence.



The plague of cows is one which lady artists only can fully appreciate. There is nothing very terrific to masculine eyes in a grove of horns, but a lady who has unwittingly pitched her camp-stool at the watering-place of cattle, and, absorbed in her work, has been surrounded unawares, passes a *mauvais quart d'heure*. Little calves are gentle and friendly visitors, who will come up to any one sitting motionless in their meadows, and snuff at his hands and clothes with their fragrant noses. And in warmer countries,

fuses his colours, and her dry or rocky ground refuses to allow the insertion of the spear of his umbrella. Let him, however, not flatter himself that he can escape the difficulties by means of an artist's tent. The tent becomes an oven even under a moderate sun.

Sweet, provocative, and piquant little trials, which give a zest to the pleasantest, purest, and most engrossing "sport" in the world! Let the artist pitch his stool and easel in the flowery outskirts of some English country town—



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darting lizards will start across his feet, or stop motionless, but for the little quick heart beating in their throats—

"So still, the golden lizard on him paused."

The gnats will not spare the artist; and even in temperate and comfortable England, the country freest of all from out-door plagues, there are some sketching grounds—the sandy and fir-clad cliffs of Bournemouth, for instance—where the gnats (often reinforced by light squadrons of sand-flies) are more active, more indomitable, and more numerous than on the Grand Canal, in the lanes of Fiesole, or by the stagnant waters of some old Genoese garden. Nor is the Nature whose beauty he is studying always kind to her devotee; her wind tries the stability of his sketching easel, her sun dazzles his eyes, or, worse still, con-

"Not wholly in the busy world, nor quite
Beyond it"—

where,

"Sitting muffled in dark leaves, you hear
The windy clanging of the minster clock."

He will find these chimes following on each other so closely as to make something like a continuous tune; too closely, alas! for that is too perfect a pastime which shortens the hours of such a golden day.

As to the acquaintance made with the nooks and corners of a beautiful country, though the apologists for angling tell us that their sport is the great discoverer of these, sketching will certainly do as much, and more; and who will compare the divided attention of the angler with the keen, constant, and reverential study of the artist? If ever

"The day shall dawn on peacefuller woods and brooks,"

as the author of "Philip van Artevelde" has prophesied in his impassioned yet stately verses, if ever what we conventionally call "sport" is done away with, sketching from Nature, the best of sports, will have supplanted it.

An indefatigable artist, Mr. Gilbert Hamerton, has told us how he combated the difficulties which hem in the beauties of Nature, especially in the inclement North. He had a little wooden hut constructed, with plate-glass windows, and carried to the moor he wished to study; and there he made the most minute and elaborate studies of foreground growth, setting the elements at defiance. Weeks were spent in the pleasant work. Since Mr. Hamerton made this experiment, it has been largely followed, with less studious intentions than were his; a number of "camps" have been organised in different parts of the country, but none has proved so successful, so free from every shadow of *ennui*, as those which have had sketching from Nature as their object.

Which are the most sketchable countries? Not always the most paintable, and never such as present panoramic "views." Indeed, if Nature ever could, fancifully, be supposed to be in a self-conscious mood, it is when she stands arrayed in the glories of mountain and valley, lake and waterfall; or, at least, when transferred to canvas such scenes have not the charm of simplicity and accident. Speaking generally, a sketcher cannot go wrong if he sketches what specially delights him, however unconventional in composition it may be, and however unattractive it may seem to others. If he enjoys drawing it, his enjoyment will be apparent in his picture, and will give it the human interest which is the secret charm of all fine artistic work. It is in vain that an artist (and the fault is a common one) attempts to give an *unloved* landscape a fictitious human interest by attaching a story to some group of landscape-painter's figures, or, still worse, by appending the afterthought of a line of poetry. Copious quotation may be taken as the sign of art which is in itself not poetical; and a French critic has pronounced English catalogues to be the most interesting part of our exhibitions. We are, after all, a literary people, and our very art has too much of the *littérateur* and too little both of the artist and of the workman about it.

We need not go far afield for sketchable "bits." The Thames alone might occupy a sketching lifetime. There is first the exquisite Upper Thames, with all its meadows in flower, and its low hills, either wooded or pastorally clothed in grass, or scarlet and golden with wheat and poppies. Unfortunately, many an *ague* lurks among its gentle mists and in its evening chills; and therefore only full daylight work on the river is possible for those who regard their health. Then there is the utterly different Thames below London—how much less beautiful! yet even more sketchable in its broad effects, still further simplified by the ever-present smoky mist, while the masts and rigging produce elegantly accentuated forms. Colour here, however, is wanting, for it is distinctly a mis-

take to suppose that smoke gives anything like fine tone to the atmosphere. It produces a thin blackness which is very different from the *rich* darkness of natural colours in shadowed water, old boats and buildings, and so on. Nevertheless, it produces fine effects with a lurid sunset, for instance, and, as we have said, it is valuable in losing detail. Etchers have long since found out the value of the Thames from Chelsea downwards as an artist's river; and the most accomplished lady landscape-painter in England—Miss Clara Montalba—is about to devote a considerable time to sketching the boats and barges of Rosherville. Is London itself, as well as its river, sketchable? Mr. Whistler, when he etched St. James's Street, evidently thought so; and a clever Neapolitan, M. de Nittis, has taken a four-wheel cab, and sketched from Nature in the middle of Piccadilly; nor could he by a less conscientious method, or by a mere effort of memory, have produced the brilliant movement, the better than photographic reality which his pictures show. It cannot be too often impressed on the sketcher from Nature that no stroke done from life is lost; it has its own inimitable and inestimable *cachet* of truth. The practice of working altogether in the open air is becoming more and more prevalent, as the love for intelligent realism increases.

Eminently sketchable is Ireland, with its picturesque climate—picturesque both in its sudden and gusty rains, and in the peculiarly liquid and pure character of its serene weather, more particularly on the west coast. Scotland is a notable painting ground. We have sometimes heard Mr. Millais describe its brilliancy of colour as comparable to that of a wet pebble. Every one knows the dull hues of a dry pebble, and how the rich colours appear when it is wetted. Scotland is so constantly washed with rain that its tints are never deadened or dulled; it is the wet pebble among countries. A large number of our younger artists have worked in Brittany of late. One advantage of foreign sketching is undoubtedly the costume of the peasantry, besides which, the change of language and of type gives a zest to a summer holiday; and the cheap inns, with their simple but excellent *bourgeois* cookery, are no small attraction. Nor are any people pleasanter to stay amongst than the quaint Bretons, whose manners and customs may be studied in their most primitive simplicity. Even more do we recommend Holland to the water-colour artist. The red Dutch towns and pearly rivers, with the dark-sailed barges—a splendidly rich brown is the most usual colour—make pictures at every turn, while the country has the great advantage of all flat countries—plenty of sky. The scenery of skies, their perspective, their plan and movement, the meaning of the clouds, their characteristics and their association with the phases of the weather, the construction and anatomy of a storm, the gradations of a blue sky from the horizon to the zenith, form a study unparalleled in beauty and in interest, and one that is much neglected by contemporary schools of painting. English summer-skies are charming in the tenderness

of colour imparted by the slight damp of the atmosphere. The Irish skies in the west have a peculiar radiance and intensity; they are swept clean, as it were, by the great sea-winds. The cloudy summer-skies of Italy are especially rich in electricity, and, therefore, magnificent in the grandeur of the cloud-forms; her *blue* skies are the despair of art, for no brush has ever succeeded, or ever can succeed, in combining their depth of colour with their intensity of light. Much blue, besides, is not to be trifled with, for no colour can offend so much if it be not chosen by the finest eye.

The subject of rustic models is suggestive of many a quaint reminiscence. The more primitive the peasant, the more suspicious he is of the mysterious

process of sketching; the lurking fear in many countries that the drawing—if it be a military one in which he figures—will be used against him for the purposes of the conscription, is a pathetic evidence of the one great horror of a peasant's heart. Even if he is willing to sit, some unwonted neatness in his dress, or some barbarous holiday-finery, turns all his picturesqueness into vulgarity, and self-consciousness destroys his grace. But there are some, particularly among the Italians, who seem to be too intelligent and too simple ever to lose dignity and freedom of movement.

Spring is calling the artists to their true studio—the open air. May they prosper on the pleasantest of errands!

Alice Oldcastle.



A FAMILY CHAT ON CHEESE.



NEVER buy the cheese, I leave that to my husband. He always says I can do a great many things, but I cannot choose cheese," said Mrs. Thompson one day, as together we turned from the importunate tradesman who was calling our attention to the respective merits of "prime Cheshire," and "first-rate American, quite

as good as Cheshire, and threepence or fourpence a pound cheaper."

"I suppose Mr. Thompson has a taste for a particular variety," said I.

"He has very good taste, far better than mine, I freely acknowledge," replied my friend. "He always looks for sharp and crumbly cheese, that bites your tongue when you take it." I try to get it as he likes it, but somehow I so often have failed and procured a supply of the mild, soapy sort, that he has at last taken that part of the marketing upon himself."

"I don't suppose you are very much to blame for that," said I; "it is not an easy thing to find the sharp crumbly cheese in ordinary shops. Perhaps Mr. Thompson buys it at some large establishment where there is plenty of choice."

"That is just it, he does so; and there he is able to get what he wants. I very much prefer the sharp kind, not only because it is more appetising, but because it is more economical. The mild kind is finished directly. The servants, unless closely watched, cut all the soft inner portion in huge wedges and leave the rind to get hard and dry; and when cut in that way there is a great deal of waste with cheese."

"There certainly is, unless the servants are either trustworthy or well looked after. But there are so many nice dishes that can be made of dried cheese grated, that there is no excuse for waste in that respect."

"Are there?" said Mrs. Thompson, looking very much interested. "I'm afraid I don't know them then. My only idea of avoiding waste has been to abstain from having fresh cheese till all the old was used, and the result of that has been that we have had to go without at intervals, and in the end I have been compelled to wink at the fact that the badly-cut rind was conveyed to the dust-bin."

"Ah! that is a pity. Cheese is really very nourishing, and I have good authority for saying that, for those who can digest it, it is twice as nourishing as cooked meat."

"I should like you to tell me, however, the dishes you make of cheese that is cut down near the rind."

"I will with pleasure, but I must first tell you that, as I make a point of using up every little bit of cheese, I also make a point of getting *good* cheese, good Cheshire or good American. For, you know, there are cheeses and cheeses. Then another point is, I don't let the cheese get *too* hard. It should be just so dry that it can be grated on an ordinary coarse grater, and when in this condition it can be used in ever so many ways; therefore care should be taken to use it at the right time."

"I see. Are you then an advocate for getting in a large piece of cheese at once?"

"If I lived in the country, and had a difficulty in getting good cheese, I should certainly buy a large piece when I had a favourable opportunity, and cut off a small quantity at a time for immediate use, putting the rest away in a cool cellar till we were ready for another slice. I dare say you know that it is a good