THREE DAYS IN SUSSEX.

I BELIEVE that writers upon English country-house life always praise it—but one privately meets many persons in England who confess to you that they do not admire it as much as it is admired in books. A friend of mine, who is never content unless his own house is full, cannot abide going to the houses of other people. An old lady, excessively fond of society, assures me that country-houses are too social for her; and a young lady says that at the end of three days spent in one of them she is quite exhausted with the efforts to be agreeable. Energetic people are perhaps less apt to like them than quiet people. The number of English people—and very social people—who tell me that they do not commonly enjoy country-houses, would surprise me did I not know that nothing is so perfect that it will not be quarreled with, and that half the grumbling is done to make conversation. The excuses of people to get away before the time appointed for their departure are among standing jokes. Yet it is doubtful if the most skillful excuses of guests ever deceive hosts who have been bored themselves and who are profound critics of boredom. I think that there is certainly one point upon which the admirers of country-houses have said too much. I refer to the vaunted liberty of country-houses. They are beautiful; they are charmingly appointed; they are anything else you like; but they are not, as a rule, as free as they are said to be. Things are made for you to do. There is rowing on the lake, there is lawn tennis, there is shooting at a mark, drives and walks to various water-falls and other wonders of the neighborhood. Of course it is open to you not to do these things, but you feel that it would be peculiar and unsocial not to do some of them. There is, indeed, a rigidity in those very customs which are supposed of themselves to mark the freedom of country-houses. The life seems to be characterized by enforced freedom. For instance, you must wear a rough shooting-coat until dinner-time; you must wear a "billy-cock" hat except at church on Sunday when you put on a black coat and a high hat. At breakfast, in some houses, you must pour out your own tea and help yourself from the sideboard. These are peculiarities of country-house life which make it irksome for you until you have got hold of the real meaning of this life, and have grasped it by the right handle.

The real use of a country-house is the cultivation amidst the best material and social conditions of a comfortable repose. The state of mind one should seek to attain is that of a "*wise* passiveness," a salutary empty-mindedness. And this is as good a state of mind as could be desired for the leisure of a hard worker. This state of mind is assisted by an easy coat and a low hat; indeed, it would be unattainable without them. It is assisted also by what seem at first the laboriously free-and-easy manners of the breakfast table. The guests begin the day with the knowledge that they are to be in one another's society till midnight, and feel it not only their privilege, but their duty, to be dull. If the host observes two people in a lively conversation at breakfast, he says: "Do you people expect to keep that up all day?" If the house happens to be full of young people, one is sufficiently employed at breakfast in looking at them, for the beautiful complexions which flourish in this country appear to best advantage in the morning. The thick bloom is actually thrown upon the faces, and the hair is so bright and strong. When I was young I never noticed the hair of young people. Why is it, I wonder, that when one's own locks become few and dingy one derives such exquisite pleasure from seeing heads of fresh and abundant brown hair!

Fifield, near which I was staying some time ago, is a very pretty village in Sussex, and lies in the midst of a highly cultivated and beautiful country. I was at a house not half a mile from the village, and I walked thither at least three times a day. Though I knew I should have no letters, I went to the post-office and demanded them. I often entered an attractive and commodious inn,—which is one of the good points of Fifield,—and made the acquaintance of the inn-keeper, whom I found a communicative and entertaining person. He was a good historian of the families of the neighborhood, and gave me interesting accounts of the great parliamentary fights of fifty years ago, when two of the leading families of Fifield nearly ruined themselves in their contentions for the repre-

sentation of the borough. The landlord's father and grandfather were born in this same house, and I know not how many generations before them. The house had some quaint engravings and some rare china. I was shown the remnants of a set of Worcester which had been bought entire by the landlord's mother, thirty years ago, for eight shillings, from an old peddler woman who had come to the house with them. The set now, if perfect, would no doubt bring a hundred pounds. But no care had been taken of it, the children of the house and the laborers of the farm having often had tea out of it in the fields.

The morning hours are the best to spend in walking about a village, and watching the village sights. It is wonderful how long a time three days is in a village; on how many village matters in that time one may form, correct, and re-form opinions. I got to know by sight if not by name the tradesmen, the parsons, two or three of the village eccentrics and a goodly number of the gentry. The clergy you see at church, the peasantry and many of the tradesmen are likely to touch their hats to you in the street,—are pretty sure to do so if you happen to be staying with some of the neighboring gentry,—and you must be careful to touch your hat in return. The gentry are a great deal in the village. They come to attend the sessions or to see the grocer and the butcher, or perhaps more commonly to make the "haunt of social men" the object of a morning's ride. Properly to estimate the felicity of the condition of an English country gentleman one must see him ride into a village near his estate on a pleasant summer morning. His advent produces a noticeable impression in the village street. Not that people are over ready with flatteries and attentions; but everybody he meets or has occasion to speak to is very civil, and he feels himself the object of a general, if silent, interest and respect. Meanwhile the object of this homage is on no account obliged to support his dignity by dressing himself in a high hat and a black coat. On the contrary, his trowsers are perhaps thrust in his boots; he wears a rusty shooting-jacket, and covers his head with an old soft hat. These old clothes, taken together with the public respect for their occupant, and with the fine animal on which he is mounted, give an impression of enviable liberty and of thorough delight and satisfaction in life, which I believe not to be in the least exaggerated. A gentleman in the dress of a stable-boy rode up to the post-office on a large white-faced and white-footed mare, very powerfully made, which to my eyes looked the model of a hunter. When I admired her, he assured me that she was as good as she looked, and with considerable pride recounted the history of some of her exploits across country in Nottinghamshire, where he had formerly hunted, and from which county he had brought her.

On market days the gentry who are magistrates come to the village to sit at the Quarter Sessions and Petty Sessions. It may be well here to tell the reader what Petty Sessions and Quarter Sessions are, for though no doubt he has often read about them in the novels of Trollope and others, his notions of them may be vague. Both, of course, are benches of magistrates. These magistrates receive no pay, and are content to serve for the consideration in the community which "J. P." written after their names is supposed to give them.

The Quarter Sessions, as the name indicates, sits once in three months. The Petty Sessions generally sits weekly. The Quarter Sessions is attended by all the magistrates for the division of the county over which it has jurisdiction. But at Petty Sessions two justices are sufficient to try cases. The first proceeding in all criminal cases, except that of high treason, takes place before the Petty Sessions. They have the power to deal summarily with offenses of a trivial nature. Persons accused of grave crimes they send either to the Quarter Sessions or the Assizes. There is in many large country-houses a magistrate's room, to which the delinquent is taken for a hearing in case no Petty Sessions is to be held the next day. At the house at which I was staying, the large oak room beside the hall, used as a smoking-room, was the magistrate's room.

The Petty Sessions at Fifield was held in a large room in the Royal Sussex, the tavern I have just spoken of; I went one morning and found the room filled with prisoners and their friends. A few idle and pleasant-looking young fellows, sons of gentlemen, sat near the magistrates and seemed to derive considerable amusement from the proceedings. The magistrates, of whom there were perhaps half a dozen, sat on a bench behind a rude, unpainted wooden table. I noticed one gentleman among them who has had to do, during certain recent complications, with matters much

graver than the administration of justice upon the lesser delinquent of Fifield. I heard but one case. A boy of fourteen charged a wooden-looking rustic (who, with a nervous stare and an extremely pale countenance, sat awaiting his fate) with having knocked him down and beaten him. The rustic was stone deaf, and the clerk was obliged to shout in his ear the charge and the evidence of the boy. He was then told he might ask questions of the boy, and in the tones almost of an automaton he turned to him and said:

"Didn't you hit me first?"

"No," said the manly and honest little boy.

We all agreed that the boy had a nice and inquiring face, while it was evident, from the physiognomy of the rustic, that he was a violent-tempered, dangerous person. Presently the boy was compelled to admit that he had first pulled the man's beard, and the truth was at once plain to everybody. The poor fellow, who was not very strong in his head, had been teased by the boy, and goaded into giving him a beating which was severe, perhaps, but not much more severe than his impudence had deserved. Immediately the two parties exchanged physiognomies. One of the magistrates was heard to say, "He's a cheeky boy, and I believe he hit him." The decision of the magistrates was that there should be no fine, but that the man should pay the costs, which were some twenty-five shillings. I then left, persuaded that the judgment rendered had been substantially just, and admiring the untechnical and common-sense methods by which it had been obtained. I may mention one incident to show the untechnical nature of the examination. The boy had said that the man had knocked out two of his teeth. The chairman told a constable to look at the boy's mouth. The constable made the boy open his mouth, and said that he thought his teeth were all there.

If the morning hours are the best to spend in watching village society, village scenery is never so charming as at the close of the day. Fifield lies on the side and summit of rather a steep hill, its main street winding in the shape of a letter S. One afternoon, as I passed through this street on my way to take my accustomed walk before sundown, I thought the village presented a singularly charming appearance. The clean ascending street was full of the beautiful reflections of the approaching sunset; the old brick houses and pretty cottages lay in a gentle light, while even the post-office and the modern apothecary shop, with its plate-glass windows, were exquisitely illumined. During these walks, for the first time in my life I have really liked English scenery. An American, instead of getting to admire English scenery by seeing much of it, is, I think, apt to like it less and less, the longer he is in England. That, at least, has been my case. At first, one is pleased with the pretty little fields, the green hedges, the landscape swept and garnished like a lawn; but there succeeds, after a while, a deep longing for the scenery of his native country. The scenery of the Old World begins to produce in his mind a feeling of irritation. The excess of art and cultivation he feels to be a sort of impurity, which he would like to rub away from the surface of the country. He remembers with passion how clean are the beds of gum and sycamore, where rush the waters of his native desert; how pure are the dusty roads, climbing the great hills and lined with scorched blackberry-vines; how vast and worthy of worship are the landscapes of the poorest and harshest parts of his continent. But at Fifield, for the first time since being in England, did I sincerely like English scenery, and was I conscious of something really medicinal in it. And yet Fifield is the most English scenery that I have seen. It is the country of the curfew and the lowing herds. The landscape, as I viewed it from a hill near the village, is small, green, trim, shaded and scented with the breath of kine. Certainly I never before sufficiently observed how sweet and powerful a perfume is the breath of kine, so much talked of by the poets. There were only half a dozen cows and they were in the next field, yet, with their sighs and breathings, they appeared to scent the whole atmosphere of Fifield. One turns reluctantly from this fragrant and deeply verdant solitude, but one must turn sharply; for even in these shortened August days the dinner-hour interrupts the twilight, and one must hasten home to extinguish one's sentiment in a plate of soup that is served promptly at eight. In a half-hour's time you are at a London dinner, for such the dinner in a country-house is. The house which I have been describing I had the luck, not very common in England, to find full of young people. Some Fifield people, however, have been asked in, among them the vicar's wife, to whom next I sit, and to whom I find it my business to talk; but it is hard to do so,

because I sit opposite Dolores, a Spanish, or half Spanish, girl of fifteen, who is a beauty. The beauty of Dolores is peculiar; she has a nose I never expected to see on such a pretty girl or on such a young one. I had an impression that such extremely aquiline noses were put on later in life. She has an exquisite color, large, dark, and perpetually shining eyes, and eyelashes about an inch and a half long, just like those of Spanish young ladies I remember seeing in pictures in the New York "Ledger." Under these eyelashes this light and thin and most Roman nose juts out with surprising boldness, and yet with most fascinating and original perfection and fortunate agreement with the eyes and eyelashes, the dip of the cheek and chin, and the somnolent and somewhat childish expression.

There are other things about this house I should describe. I should say something about the "E. R." on the fire-place which means "Elizabeth Regina," the fire-place dating from the time of Elizabeth, when the house was built. I have told my friends to whom this visit was paid, that I have written a paper about them, and they are very curious to see what I shall say, and what a picture of them I shall draw for the eyes of the American public. "What did you say about the tower?" Alas! I had forgotten all about the tower. "Did you tell the story of the screen?" "No." "Well, did you say anything about the ghosts?" I am appalled at the number of things I have omitted. The truth is that at Fifield I cared more for the people than for either the tower, the screen, or the ghost. Were I Irving, I might perhaps make them as famous as the occupants of Bracebridge Hall.

NATURE'S LOVER.

(TO JOHN MUIR.)

His strong heart beat with mighty lyres of pines
  On High Sierra; he beheld the light,
  Unblenched, where eagles take their daring flight,
And brows of Alps are scored with savage lines
Where Nature, royal alchemist! her mines
  Of crystals—ages past—had open torn
  By throes in which the mountain lakes were born.
This faithful worshiper at all her shrines
Discerned divinity in every smile
  On Nature's face; where'er his footsteps trod,
Alike her strength and beauty did beguile
  His heart; he felt the gem-enameled sod
With human heart-beats touch his own—the while
  That every blossom thrilled with love of God!

Each year this devotee went up to pay
  His vows (his keen, consuming thirst to slake),
  Where quiet waters of one fairest lake
In sacred solitude and stillness lay,
Like holy font within cathedral gray;
  And in the hush, the echoes of that song
  Where hallelujahs break, were borne along
From countless choirs; while ray on glorious ray,
Like heavenly fire, shot through the brilliant deeps
  From great wall-jewels of celestial place.
The chrism of peace, divinely wrought, that keeps
  The soul assured, had touched his mortal face.
In Nature's calm—where human passion sleeps—
  It wore the luster of immortal grace.