

NANTUCKET.

THOMPSON and I had a fortnight's holiday, and the question arose how could we pass it best, and for the least money.

We are both clerks, that is to say, shopmen, in a large jobbing house; but although, like most Americans, we spend our lives in the din and bustle of a colossal shop, where selling and packing are the only pastime, and day-books and ledgers the only literature, we wish it to be understood that we have souls capable of speculating upon some other matters that have no cash value, yet which mankind cannot neglect without becoming something little better than magnified busy bees, or gigantic ants, or overgrown social caterpillars. And, although I say it myself, I have quite a reputation among our fellows, that I have earned by the confident way in which I lay down a great principle of science, æsthetics, or morals. I confess that I am perhaps a little given to generalize from a single fact; but my manner is imposing to the weaker brethren, and my credit for great wisdom is well established in our street.

Under these circumstances it became a matter of some importance to decide the question, Where can we go to the best advantage, pecuniary and æsthetic?

We had both of us, in the pursuit of our calling, — that is to say, in hunting after bad debts and drumming up new business, — travelled over most of this country on those long lines of rails that always remind me of the parallels of latitude on globes and maps; and we wondered why people who had once gratified a natural curiosity to see this land should ever travel over it again, unless with the hope of making money by their labor. Health, certainly, no one can expect to get from the tough upper-leathers and sodden soles of the pies offered at the ten-minutes-for-refreshment stations, nor from their saturated sponge-cakes. As to pleasure, I said to Thomp-

son, — “the pleasure of travelling consists in the new and agreeable sensations it affords. Above all, they must be new. You wish to move out of your old set of thoughts and feelings, or else why move at all? But all the civilized world over, locomotives, like huge flat-irons, are smoothing customs, costumes, thoughts, and feelings into one plane, homogeneous surface. And in this country not only does Nature appear to do everything by wholesale, but there is as little variety in human beings. We have discovered the political alchemist or universal solvent of the alchemists, and with it we reduce at once the national characteristics of foreigners into our well-known American compound. Hence, on all the great lines of travel, Monotony has marked us for her own. Coming from the West, you are whirled through twelve hundred miles of towns, so alike in their outward features that they seem to have been started in New England nurseries and sent to be planted wherever they might be wanted; — square brick buildings, covered with signs, and a stoutish sentry-box on each flat roof; telegraph offices; express companies; a crowd of people dressed alike, ‘earnest,’ and bustling as ants, with seemingly but one idea, — to furnish materials for the statistical tables of the next census. Then, beyond, you catch glimpses of many smaller and neater buildings, with grass and trees and white fences about them. Some are Gothic, some Italian, some native American. But the glory of one Gothic is like the glory of another Gothic, the Italian are all built upon the same pattern, and the native American differ only in size. There are three marked currents of architectural taste, but no individual character in particular buildings. Everywhere you see comfort and abundance; your mind is easy on the great subject of imports, exports, products of the soil, and manufactures; — a pleasant and strengthen-

ing prospect for a political economist, or for shareholders in railways or owners of lands in the vicinity. This 'unparalleled prosperity' must be exciting to a foreigner who sees it for the first time; but we Yankees are to the manner born and bred up. We take it all as a matter of course, as the young Plutuses do their father's fine house and horses and servants. Kingsley says there is a great, unspoken poetry in sanitary reform. It may be so; but as yet the words only suggest sewers, ventilation, and chloride of lime. The poetry has not yet become vocal; and I think the same may be said of our 'material progress.' It seems thus far very prosaic. 'Only a great poet sees the poetry of his own age,' we are told. We every-day people are unfortunately blind to it."

Here I was silent. I had dived into the deepest recesses of my soul. Thompson waited patiently until I should rise to the surface and blow again. It was thus:—

"Have you not noticed that the people we sit beside in railway cars are becoming as much alike as their brown linen 'dusters,' and unsuggestive except on that point of statistics? They are intelligent, but they carry their shops on their backs, as snails do their houses. Their thoughts are fixed upon the one great subject. On all others, politics included, they talk from hand to mouth, offering you a cold hash of their favorite morning paper. Even those praiseworthy persons who devote their time to temperance, missions, tract-societies, seem more like men of business than apostles. They lay their charities before you much as they would display their goods, and urge their excellence and comparative cheapness to induce you to lay out your money.

"The fact is, that the traveller is daily losing his human character, and becoming more and more a package, to be handled, stowed, and 'forwarded' as may best suit the convenience and profit of the enterprising parties engaged in the business. If at night he stops at a hotel, he rises to the dignity of an ani-

mal, is marked by a number, and driven to his food and litter by the herdsmen employed by the master of the establishment. To a thinking man, it is a sad indication for the future to see what slaves this hotel-railroad-steamboat system has made of the brave and the free when they travel. How they toady captains and conductors, and without murmuring put up with any imposition they please to practise upon them, even unto taking away their lives! As we all pay the same price at hotels, each one hopes by smirks and servility to induce the head-clerk to treat him a little better than his neighbors. There is no despotism more absolute than that of these servants of the public. As Cobbett said, 'In America, public servant means master.' None of us can sing, 'Yankees never will be slaves,' unless we stay at home. We have liberated the blacks, but I see little chance of emancipation for ourselves. The only liberty that is vigorously vindicated here is the liberty of doing wrong."

Here I stopped short. It was evident that my wind was gone, and any further exertion of eloquence out of the question for some time. I was as exhausted as a *Gymnotus* that has parted with all its electricity. Thompson took advantage of my helpless condition, and carried me off unresisting to a place which railways can never reach, and where there is nothing to attract fashionable travellers. The surly Atlantic keeps watch over it and growls off the pestilent crowd of excursionists who bring uncleanness and greediness in their train, and are pursued by the land-sharks who prey upon such frivolous flying-fish. A little town, whose life stands still, or rather goes backward, whose ships have sailed away to other ports, whose inhabitants have followed the ships, and whose houses seem to be going after the inhabitants; but a town in its decline, not in its decay. Everything is clean and in good repair; everybody well dressed, healthy, and cheerful. Paupers there are none; and the new school-house would be an orna-

ment to any town in Massachusetts. That there is no lack of spirit and vigor may be known from the fact that the island furnished five hundred men for the late war.

When we caught sight of Nantucket, the sun was shining his best, and the sea too smooth to raise a qualm in the bosom of the most delicately organized female. The island first makes its appearance, as a long, thin strip of yellow underlying a long, thinner strip of green. In the middle of this double line the horizon is broken by two square towers. As you approach, the towers resolve themselves into meeting-houses, and a large white town lies before you.

At the wharf there were no baggage smashers. Our trunks were

"Taken up tenderly,
Lifted with care,"

and carried to the hotel for twenty-five cents in paper. I immediately established the fact, that there are no fellow-citizens in Nantucket of foreign descent. "For," said I, "if you offered that obsolete fraction of a dollar to the turbulent hackmen of our cities, you would meet with offensive demonstrations of contempt." I seized the opportunity to add, *apropos* of the ways of that class of persons: "Theoretically, I am a thorough democrat; but when democracy drives a hack, smells of bad whiskey and cheap tobacco, ruins my portmanteau, robs me of my money, and damns my eyes when it does not blacken them, if I dare protest, — I hate it."

The streets are paved and clean. There are few horses on the island, and these are harnessed single to box-wagons, painted green, the sides of which are high enough to hold safely a child, four or five years of age, standing. We often inquired the reasons for this peculiar build; but the replies were so unsatisfactory, that we put the green box wagon as one of the mysteries of the spot.

It seemed to us a healthy symptom, that we saw in our inn none of those alarming notices that the keepers of hotels on the mainland paste up so conspicuously, no doubt from the very natural dislike to competition, "Beware

of pickpockets," "Bolt your doors before retiring," "Deposit your valuables in the safe, or the proprietors will not be responsible." There are no thieves in Nantucket; if for no other reason, because they cannot get away with the spoils. And we were credibly informed, that the one criminal in the town jail had given notice to the authorities that he would not remain there any longer, unless they repaired the door, as he was afraid of catching cold from the damp night air.

In the afternoons, good-looking young women swarm in the streets.

"Airy creatures,
Alike in voice, though not in features,"

I could wish their voices were as sweet as their faces; but the American climate, or perhaps the pertness of democracy, has an unfavorable effect on the organs of speech. Governor Andrew must have visited Nantucket before he wrote his eloquent lamentation over the excess of women in Massachusetts. I am fond of ladies' society, and do not sympathize with the Governor. But if that day should **ever** come, which is prophesied by Isaiah, when seven women shall lay hold of one man, saying, "We will eat our own bread and wear our own apparel, only let us be called by thy name," I think Nantucket will be the scene of the fulfilment, the women are so numerous and apparently so well off. I confess that I envy the good fortune of the young gentlemen who may be living there at that time. We saw a foreshadowing of this delightful future in the water. The bathing "facilities" consist of many miles of beach, and one bathing-house, in which ladies exchange their shore finery for their sea-weeds. Two brisk young fellows, Messrs. Whitey and Pypey, had come over in the same boat with us. We had fallen into a traveller's acquaintance with them, and listened to the story of the pleasant life they had led on the island during previous visits. We lost sight of them on the wharf. We found them again near the bathing-house, in the hour of their glory. There they were, disporting themselves in the

clear water, swimming, diving, floating, while around them laughed and splashed fourteen bright-eyed water-nymphs, half a dozen of them as bewitching as any Nixes that ever spread their nets for soft-hearted young *Ritters* in the old German romance waters. Neptune in a triumphal progress, with his Naiads tumbling about him, was no better off than Whitey and Pypey. They had, to be sure, no car, nor conch shells, nor dolphins; but, as Thompson remarked, these were unimportant accessories, that added but little to Neptune's comfort. The nymphs were the essential. The spectacle was a saddening one for us, I confess; the more so, because our forlorn condition evidently gave a new zest to the enjoyment of our friends, and stimulated them to increased vigor in their aquatic flirtations. Alone, un-introduced, melancholy, and a little sheepish, we hired towels at two cents each from the ladylike and obliging colored person who superintended the bath-house, and, withdrawing to the friendly shelter of **distance**, dropped our clothes upon the **sand**, and hid our envy and insignificance in the bosom of the deep.

And the town was brilliant from the absence of the unclean advertisements of quack-medicine men. That irrepressible species have not, as yet, committed their nuisance in its streets, and disfigured the walls and fences with their portentous placards. It is the only clean place I know of. The nostrum-makers have labelled all the features of Nature on the mainland, as if our country were a vast apothecary's shop. The Romans had a gloomy fashion of lining their great roads with tombs and mortuary inscriptions. The modern practice is quite as dreary. The long lines of railway that lead to our cities are decorated with cure-alls for the sick, the *ante-mortem* epitaphs of the fools who buy them and try them.

"No place is sacred to the meddling crew
Whose trade is—"

posting what we all should take. The walls of our domestic castles are outraged with *graffiti* of this class; highways and byways display them; and

if the good Duke with the melancholy Jaques were to wander in some forest of New Arden, in the United States, they would be sure to

"Find *elixirs* on trees, *bitters* in the running brooks,
Syrups on stones, and *lies* in everything."

Last year, weary of shop, and feeling the necessity of restoring tone to the mind by a course of the sublime, Thompson and I paid many dollars, travelled many miles, ran many risks, and suffered much from impertinence and from dust, in order that we might see the wonders of the Lord, his mountains and his waterfalls. We stood at the foot of the mountain, and, gazing upward at a precipice, the sublime we were in search of began to swell within our hearts, when our eyes were struck by huge Roman letters painted on the face of the rock, and held fast, as if by a spell, until we had read them all. They asked the question, "Are you troubled with worms?"

It is hardly necessary to say that the sublime within us was instantly killed. It would be fortunate, indeed, for the afflicted, if the specific of this charlatan St. George were half as destructive to the intestinal dragons he promises to destroy. Then we turned away to the glen down which the torrent plunged. And there, at the foot of the fall, in the midst of the boiling water, the foam, and spray, rose a tall crag crowned with silver birch, and hung with moss and creeping vines, bearing on its gray, weather-beaten face: "Rotterdam Schnapps." Bah! it made us sick. The caldron looked like a punch-bowl, and the breath of the zephyrs smelt of gin and water.

Thousands of us see this dirty desecration of the shrines to which we make our summer pilgrimage, and bear with the sacrilege meekly, perhaps laugh at the wicked generation of pill-vendors, that seeks for places to put up its sign. But does not this tolerance indicate the note of vulgarity in us, as Father Newman might say? Is it not a blot on the people as well as on the rocks? Let them fill the columns of newspapers with their ill-smelling advertisements, and sham testimonials from the Reverend

Smith, Brown, and Jones ; but let us prevent them from setting their traps for our infirmities in the spots God has chosen for his noblest works. What a triple brass must such men have about their consciences to dare to flaunt their falsehoods in such places ! It is a blasphemy against Nature. We might use Peter's words to them, — "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." Ananias and Sapphira were slain for less. But they think, I suppose, that the age of miracles has passed, or survives only in their miraculous cures, and so coolly defy the lightnings of Heaven. I was so much excited on this subject that Thompson suggested to me to give up my situation, turn Peter the Hermit, and carry a fiery scrubbing-brush through the country, preaching to all lovers of Nature to join in a crusade to wash the Holy Places clean of these unbelieving quacks.

It is pleasant to see that the Nantucket people are all healthy, or, if ailing, have no idea of being treated as they treat bluefish, — offered a red rag or a white bone, some taking sham to bite upon, and so be hauled in and die. As regards the salubrity of the climate, I think there can be no doubt. The faces of the inhabitants speak for themselves on that point. I heard an old lady, not very well preserved, who had been a fortnight on the island, say to a sympathizing friend, into whose ear she was pouring her complaints, "I sleeps better, and my stomach is sweeter." She might have expressed herself more elegantly, but she had touched the two grand secrets of life, — sound sleep and good digestion.

Another comfort on this island is, that there are few shops, no temptation to part with one's pelf, and no beggars, barelegged or barefaced, to ask for it. I do not believe that there are any cases of the *cacoethes subscribendi*. The natives have got out of the habit of making money, and appear to want nothing in particular, except to go a-fishing.

They have plenty of time to answer questions good-humoredly and *gratis*, and do not look upon a stranger as they

do upon a stranded blackfish, — to be stripped of his oil and bone for their benefit. "I feel like a man among Christians," I declaimed, — "not, as I have often felt in my wanderings on shore, like Mungo Park or Burton, a traveller among savages, who are watching for an opportunity to rob me. I catch a glimpse again of the golden age when money was money. The blessed old prices of my youth, which have long since been driven from the continent by

'paper credit, last and best supply,
That lends corruption lighter wings to fly,'

have taken refuge here before leaving this wicked world forever. The *cordon sanitaire* of the Atlantic has kept off the pestilence of inflation."

One bright afternoon we took horse and "shay" for Siasconset, on the south side of the island. A drive of seven miles over a country as flat and as naked of trees as a Western prairie, the sandy soil covered with a low, thick growth of bayberry, whortleberry, a false cranberry called the meal-plum, and other plants bearing a strong family likeness, with here and there a bit of greensward, — a legacy, probably, of the flocks of sheep the natives foolishly turned off the island, — brought us to the spot. We passed occasional water-holes, that reminded us also of the West, and a few cattle. Two or three lonely farm-houses loomed up in the distance, like ships at sea. We halted our rattle-trap on a bluff covered with thick green turf. On the edge of this bluff, forty feet above the beach, is Siasconset, looking southward over the ocean, — no land between it and Porto Rico. It is only a fishing village ; but if there were many like it, the conventional shepherd, with his ribbons, his crooks, and his pipes, would have to give way to the fisherman. Seventy-five cosey, one-story cottages, so small and snug that a well-grown man might touch the gables without rising on tip-toe, are drawn up in three rows parallel to the sea, with narrow lanes of turf between them, — all of a weather-beaten gray tinged with purple, with pale-

blue blinds, vines over the porch, flowers in the windows, and about each one a little green yard enclosed by white palings. Inside are odd little rooms, fitted with lockers, like the cabin of a vessel. Cottages, yards, palings, lanes, all are in proportion and harmony. Nothing common or unclean was visible, — no heaps of fish-heads, served up on clam-shells, and garnished with bean-pods, potato-skins, and corn-husks ; no pigs in sight, nor in the air, — not even a cow to imperil the neatness of the place. There was the brisk, vigorous smell of the sea-shore, flavored, perhaps, with a suspicion of oil, that seemed to be in keeping with the locality.

We sat for a long time gazing with silent astonishment upon this delightful little toy village, that looked almost as if it had been made at Nuremberg, and could be picked up and put away when not wanted to play with. It was a bright, still afternoon. The purple light of sunset gave an additional charm of color to the scene. Suddenly the *lumen juventa purpureum*, the purple light of youth, broke upon it. Handsome, well-dressed girls, with a few polygynic young men in the usual island proportion of the sexes, came out of the cottages, and stood in the lanes talking and laughing, or walked to the edge of the bluff to see the sun go down. We rubbed our eyes. Was this real, or were we looking into some showman's box ? It seemed like the Petit Trianon adapted to an island in the Atlantic, with Louis XV. and his marquises playing at fishing instead of farming.

A venerable codfisher had been standing off and on our vehicle for some time, with the signal for speaking set in his inquisitive countenance. I hailed him as Mr. Coffin ; for Cooper has made Long Tom the legitimate father of all Nantucketers. He hove to, and gave us information about his home. There was a picnic, or some sort of summer festival, going on ; and the gay lady-birds we saw were either from Nantucket, or relatives from the main. There had once been another row of

cottages outside of those now standing ; but the Atlantic came ashore one day in a storm, and swallowed them up. Nevertheless, real property had risen of late. "Why," said he, "do you see that little gray cottage yonder ? It rents this summer for ten dollars a month ; and there are some young men here from the mainland who pay one dollar a week for their rooms without board."

Thompson said his sensations were similar to those of Captain Cook or Herman Melville when they first landed to skim the cream of the fairy islands of the Pacific.

I was deeply moved, and gave tongue at once. "It is sad to think that these unsophisticated, uninflated people must undergo the change civilization brings with it. The time will come when the evil spirit that presides over watering-places will descend upon this dear little village, and say to the inhabitants that henceforth they must catch men. Neatness, cheapness, good-feeling, will vanish ; a five-story hotel will be put up, — the process cannot be called building ; and the sharks that infest the coast will come ashore in shabby coats and trousers, to prey upon summer pleasure-seekers."

"In the mean time," said Thompson, "why should not we come here to live ? We can wear old clothes, and smoke cigars of the *Hippalektryon* brand. Dr. Johnson must have had a poetic prevision of Nantucket when he wrote his *impecunious* lines :

'Has Heaven reserved, in pity for the poor,
No pathless waste or undiscovered shore,
No secret island in the boundless main ?'

This is the island. What an opening for young men of immoderately small means ! The climate healthy and cool ; no mosquitoes ; a choice among seven beauties, perhaps the reversion of the remaining six, if Isaiah can be relied upon. In our regions, a thing of beauty is an expense for life ; but with a house for three hundred dollars, and bluefish at a cent and a half a pound, there is no need any more to think of high prices and the expense of bringing up a family. If the origin of evil was,

that Providence did not create money enough, here it is in some sort Paradise."

"That 's Heine," said I; "but Heine forgot to add, that one of the Devil's most dangerous tricks is to pretend to supply this sinful want by his cunning device of inconvertible paper money, which lures men to destruction and something worse."

Our holiday was nearly over. We

packed up our new sensations, and steamed away to piles of goods and columns of figures. Town and steeples vanished in the haze, like the domes and minarets of the enchanted isle of Borondon. Was not this as near to an enchanted island as one could hope to find within twenty-five miles of New England? Nantucket is the gem of the ocean without the Irish, which I think is an improvement.

THE SNOW-WALKERS.

HE who marvels at the beauty of the world in summer will find equal cause for wonder and admiration in winter. It is true the pomp and the pageantry are swept away, but the essential elements remain, — the day and the night, the mountain and the valley, the elemental play and succession and the perpetual presence of the infinite sky. In winter the stars seem to have rekindled their fires, the moon achieves a fuller triumph, and the heavens wear a look of a more exalted simplicity. Summer is more wooing and seductive, more versatile and human, appeals to the affections and the sentiments, and fosters inquiry and the art impulse. Winter is of a more heroic cast, and addresses the intellect. The severe studies and disciplines come easier in winter. One imposes larger tasks upon himself, and is less tolerant of his own weaknesses.

The tendinous part of the mind, so to speak, is more developed in winter; the fleshy, in summer. I should say winter had given the bone and sinew to Literature, summer the tissues and blood.

The simplicity of winter has a deep moral. The return of Nature, after such a career of splendor and prodigality, to habits so simple and austere, is not lost either upon the head or the heart. It is the philosopher coming

back from the banquet and the wine to a cup of water and a crust of bread.

And then this beautiful masquerade of the elements, — the novel disguises our nearest friends put on! Here is another rain and another dew, water that will not flow, nor spill, nor receive the taint of an unclean vessel. And if we see truly, the same old beneficence and willingness to serve lurk beneath all.

Look up at the miracle of the falling snow, — the air a dizzy maze of whirling, eddying flakes, noiselessly transforming the world, the exquisite crystals dropping in ditch and gutter, and disguising in the same suit of spotless livery all objects upon which they fall. How novel and fine the first drifts! The old, dilapidated fence is suddenly set off with the most fantastic ruffles, scalloped and fluted after an unheard-of fashion! Looking down a long line of decrepit stone-wall, in the trimming of which the wind had fairly run riot, I saw, as for the first time, what a severe yet master artist old Winter is. Ah, a severe artist! How stern the woods look, dark and cold and as rigid against the horizon as iron!

All life and action upon the snow have an added emphasis and significance. Every expression is underscored. Summer has few finer pictures than this winter one of the farmer foddering