4. The dome of the taconics.

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Pillar which God aloft had set,
So that men might it not forget ;
It should be their life's ornament
And mix itself with each event ;
Gauge and calendar and dial,
Weather-glass and chemic phial,
Garden of berries, perch of birds,
Pasture of pool-haunting herds,
Graced by each change of sun untold,
Earth-baking heat, stone-cleaving cold.

R. W. EMERSON.

THE DOME OF THE TACONICS.

THE traveller by the Housatonic Railway, northward bound from New York, becomes aware, soon after leaving Ashley Falls, of a mountain of no mean proportions, walling up the western view. It is a mountain whose smooth outlines and gracious curves somewhat disguise its real proportions. At first sight the supercilious tourist from more ambitious altitudes might easily pass by its beauties and count it a small affair; though his map will tell him that it is a bit higher than the Mount Desert hills, and the peer of many of the lesser peaks in the White Mountain ranges.

But it is never safe to despise a mountain because it does not stun you with its proportions. The man who respects a high peak solely because of the challenge it makes to his eye or to his muscles, may be an athlete or a sensation-seeker; he is not a true lover of the high places of earth. Altitude is only an incident of a mountain. It is not essential either to its beauty or to its impressiveness. I can easily imagine that a sensitive and self-respecting peak might be as unwilling to be judged by its height alone as a man would be. Only the grandeurs and

sublimities of the earth are emphasised by enormous heights. Its beauties lie closest to the less ambitious hills.

So, as the eye becomes more familiar with this peak which stands guard over Sheffield and Egremont, one learns to hold it in greater respect and affection. Seen from the South Egremont and Great Barrington side, whence it seems to rise abruptly from the valley, and make first a quick and then a more gradual approach to the clouds, it justifies the preference of the older people of the region, who resented the attempt to christen it "Mt. Everett," and clung to the old name, "The Dome." A dome it is in outline and in mass, rounded, soaring, crowning its lower spurs and ridges, as the grand curves of St. Peter's top its nave and transepts. It rises twenty-six hundred feet above sea-level, and nineteen hundred above the valley. Its sides are clad in a growth of maples, chestnuts, and birches, as far as the upper ledges where the scrub-oaks and pines compete with the blueberry bushes in the struggle for existence. Here and there a few pines and hemlocks remain to tell the tale of a glory which has been shorn away from these slopes; and in the very heart of the mountainside, facing the sunrise, a deep and precipitous glen, the channel of a fitful stream, is dark with evergreen foliage.

Of course the summit of this mountain early became a place coveted for the soles of my feet. There is but little pedestrian ambition among the Berkshire

summer population, especially if the high hills are the objective points. The usual method of getting up the Dome from South Egremont, is to ride some ten miles into the town of Mount Washington, to a point within less than twenty minutes from the summit; and so all the delights of the ascent are diluted into a kind of waggon picnic. Nobody seemed to know of any good path from the South Egremont or eastern side; and it took a little faith and common sense to decide that the climb could be made from this side under much better conditions than by the roundabout and lazy route most in vogue.

Early in the season a little party of us undertook the ascent, found an easy and romantic path, and enjoyed a glorious view. Being sure of the pleasures of this trip, I determined to summon my comrade in spring outings, himself a tall dominie, and introduce him to the beauties of his own contiguous territory, the fair valleys and hills of Columbia County, New York. He was entirely willing to take a small holiday and answered the call with alacrity, bringing fair weather and a northerly breeze along with him. Monday morning brought him to us apparently as fresh and bright as if it were not the day after Sunday, and by two o'clock we were bowling along in our farmer's "two-seater"—an instructor in New York University, a freshman in the same college, the other dominie, and myself. We survived the suffocating dust which rose from the parched roads in the four-mile drive to the Knickerbocker

farm, and at two twenty-five slung our lunch-boxes and started up the path for the summit. Like most well-regulated mountain trails this one began in a wood-road, old and grass-grown and mossy, but easy of grade and for the most part clear to the eye.

The first half-hour was spent in doubling backward and forward, beating up-hill as it were, against a fairly heavy grade. The way was lined with hardwood bushes, with ferns and mosses most cool and refreshing to sight and to smell. Here and there a group of wild sunflowers lent their bright yellow hues to the scene, and once we stumbled upon some foxglove. The mountain vegetation was showing the effects of the drought which had been searing the fields in the valleys, and had made great strides toward autumnal hues in the three weeks since we were over the path before. A little spring beside which we had eaten our supper on that previous ascent was now but the shadow of a refreshing name, a mere dry and empty earthen bowl. We were disappointed in our expectations of a cool draught at this wayside fountain, but remembering another, only a mile or so farther up, we pushed on in hope.

Ten minutes more along a pathway through fresh young birches and maples, brought us to the turning in the path where before we had made the mistake of keeping straight on which cost us an hour and a half of needless tramping. This time we swung to the left, by the "blazes" we ourselves had made,

and came suddenly into the finest stretch of the whole route, a path lined for nearly a mile with the dark, glossy leaves of the mountain laurel; a path which was glorious for refreshing, deep, restful green in this hot August day; a path which in June, with its blossoms rivalling the pink and white of the apple-trees in the plains below, must be more magnificent than the costliest gardens of royalty. Nor are August and June the only months in which this path would woo the lover of the beautiful; for all along its sides, peeping out from beneath the underbrush and the creeping vines, were the unmistakable leaves and hairy stems of the trailing arbutus, where next May the tiny pink cups of its blossoms will be uplifted, full to the brim of the choicest fragrance of the spring.

Soon after the laurels are passed, the path crosses the bed of a stream, and turns a sharp corner to the right, close by an old corduroy bridge. A few rods to the east of it is a spring whose waters we had found as abundant as they were sweet and cool, but which now was dried up to about a scanty pint, lingering in the last hollows of its rocks. But there was enough to slake our moderate thirst and leave sufficient for our return. Then for a half-mile we hastened southwest through an almost level path which winds about the base of the mountain's last great dome, before we bent sharply to the south-east and scrambled up the narrow footpath toward the open ledges. The sun came slanting through the saplings which

crowd close to the path, slender shafts of "splintered sunlight" which fall most temperately into these cool shades, through which we clambered at a round pace, which soon brought us to the pole that marks the highest point upon the Dome.

It was a noble prospect which opened all around us. From this extreme south-western corner of Massachusetts the hills and vales of four States stretch away to distant horizons. Northward, beyond the saddle-back of Greylock, lay the lower hills of Vermont. Eastward were the hill-towns of Massachusetts, Berkshire and Hampden farms and villages. To the south the Taconic range strayed off into Connecticut and lost itself, and westward the valley of the Hudson swept broad and green up to the base of the Catskills. It was a scene to charm and rest the eye and mind. It was an outlook upon nature not in her moods of wildness or of solitude, but as she comes from the hand of man, trimmed of her asperities, combed and brushed with axe and plough, with a gracious air of cultivation and of refinement.

Everywhere about the mountain's base, far as the eye could reach, were the splendid farms of Berkshire and of Columbia. On the east the valley of the Housatonic; westward Green River and its smooth meadows and low hills. It was a surprise and a pleasure to note how much forest is still left on these mountains and hills, nor can one fail to connect the verdure of these countless acres of farming land with the other acres of wooded heights. The

Catskills were immersed in a blue haze whose tremulous lights hid all but the faintest outlines of those romantic peaks ; while faint and far, a mere hint of a range in the distance, we could make out the Shawangunk Mountains, flanked on the east with the Highlands of the Hudson.

The impression left upon my mind after many trips to this delightful summit is a strong feeling of its resemblance to the Lake Country in England. One has the same sense of wildness which has been treated and reduced by man's care. There is the same mingling of mountainside and farm-meadow. If the American scene is lacking in the lakes, the water glimpses which make the English one so fair, it is superior in the splendid sweep of the landscape lines, and in the ample forests on these great hill ranges. Bryant puts the double charm of these Berkshire views in his lines :

> " Thou shalt gaze at once
> Here on white villages and tilth and herds,
> And swarming roads, and there on solitudes
> That only hear the torrent, and the wind,
> And eagle's shriek."

But the declining sun warned us that we must turn valleyward again ; and with reluctant feet, as every lover of the heights must leave them, we plunged into the gathering shadows of the woods. We made quick time back to the beginning of the laurel path. But when we turned this woodland corner, a new idea possessed us. We knew we were

at the head of the ravine which makes up the mountainside, for we were crossing the dry bed of the brook, which could have no other outlet. Why should we not shorten our way and extend our information by a short cut to the base of the mountains through this "Mossy Gill?" The motion was put to vote and the vote was at once put into motion. We threaded our way along the almost dry bed of the stream, down a grade which at first was adapted to a dignified and graceful gait, as we stepped from stone to stone.

But presently scene, surroundings, and footpath all changed. The young maples and birches gave place to tall hemlocks, looking down on the prostrate trunks of their ancient comrades. The bed of the brook took a more decided pitch downward and the little ledges, worn by the waters of many spring freshets and smooth and slippery with moss, began to make drops of four, and six, and eight feet. We left the boulders and crept along the side of the gorge, thrusting our feet deep into the mouldy soil, and between fallen trunks and tree limbs. Soon we came to a ledge some fifteen feet in height, where a smooth log, caught in the clefts of the rocks, tempted the clerical brother to try a sort of primitive toboggan slide. The slide was accomplished, but the damage to his apparel, especially his pantaloons, was irreparable. The rest of the party slid, crawled, and dropped in other ways to the ledges below.

But a harder pinch came a few moments later, when we found ourselves caught between flank-

ing precipices, sheer and perpendicular and dropping forty or fifty feet, and only the narrow ravine of the brook, and its shrubby, shelving ledges, to offer us a way down. How we got out of the pocket I never shall quite realise. But like many another hard thing in life, we got through before we knew it, and landed fully thirty feet below the edge of the fall, in only two "drops," with no bones broken and only one big rent in the company. Then the path grew easier, and we had time to observe more appreciatively the charming scene. It is a marvel that the place is not better known and more frequently visited by the summer populace of Sheffield and Egremont. If such a wild and romantic glen were in the White Mountains or the Catskills, so rugged, so moist and cool, so upholstered with moss and fern, it would be sought from afar, and the tourist would scatter the shells of his hard-boiled-egg lunches on every stump and boulder. But it is just as well that the possibilities of this great ravine in the Dome should not be sought out. Its beauties will remain the choice possession of the few who have seen and loved them.

We sat us down beside the relics of the brook and ate our supper in the forest twilight, to the sweet accompaniment of a tinkling little rill, all that the drought had spared of the sturdy stream. Then, when we had carefully draped and repaired the tall dominie so that he might venture again among his kind, we trudged through the dust and the dusk a tedious five miles to the cottage.