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18. By the blithe brook.

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18. BY THE BLITHE BROOK.

I chatter over stony ways  
In little sharps and trebles,  
I bubble into eddying bays,  
I babble on the pebbles.

I chatter, chatter, as I flow  
To join the brimming river,  
For men may come, and men may go,  
But I go on forever.

ALFRED TENNYSON.



## BY THE BLITHE BROOK.

I COUNT a passion for brooks among the most deep-seated and intense of my loves. From earliest boyhood the gurgle of a running stream has always filled me with the same joy, though in a different key, as the roll of the surf or the wind in the forest trees. To come upon a brook as it slips under the highway bridge ; or as it loiters across the open meadow ; or as it tumbles over its rocky bed on the hillside ; or as it gladdens the stillness of the woods with its musical ripple,—was always a refreshment to the spirit like that which its cool waters give to the body. To no verse in the Bible does my heart yield quicker response than that which says, “He shall drink of the brook by the wayside, and shall look up.” With body and with soul I say “Amen.” I never pass a brook without a “Te Deum.” And I have given myself a dyspepsia many a time, in a country where brooks abound, because I could not resist the seductive tipples they afford.

So it has been a keen delight in these summer days to find myself the near neighbour of a most engaging brook ; a brook which was active and cheerful all summer long ; a brook which was typ-

ical of all that a brook ought to be, outside of a forest country ; a brook which from outlet to source invited human companionship and lent itself to human comfort.

We made acquaintance with it at its outlet, where it loses itself in the lake it helps to feed. It was one of our chief pleasures on hot July days to row between the beds of horse-tails and bulrushes which mark its entrance, between banks where crowding alders and willows screen the meadows on either hand, and where copses of the jewel-weed and loosestrife gleam against the green, under the branches which meet above its yellow waters, until our skiff grounded on its pebbly shoals. These brief voyages were always enlivened by sweet bird-voices, the robin, the song sparrow, the unmelodious catbird, and the clattering kingfisher all lending their notes to protest against our presence. Half-way up the navigable portion of the stream there was a break in the thicket, a pathway, and a landing-place. Through this portal to the meadow, one caught frequent glimpses of the haymakers, while the fragrance of the new-mown grass enriched the breezes ; and in the near foreground rose the green urn of one of those noble elms, the glory of New England's fields, peerless in any land for beauty and for grace.

We met the brook again where it paralleled the road for which centuries ago it had surveyed and prepared a bed. The frequent rains of this moist

summer had kept it full, and its voice was clear and jubilant as it hastened toward the silence of the lake. A sharp clamber brought us to a little plateau where the hilly stairway broadened into a sort of landing, and the brook stayed its swift currents in a tiny mill-pond by whose brown pool an aged mill bore witness to the ancient service of the stream ; and two nestling cottages, homes of three generations of New England farmers, suggested the long story which might be told of the brook's alliance with human interests, and the parallel stream of life which for a century has run beside its own.

It was on a hot morning, when we sought a cool retreat, that we turned aside a little distance higher up the stream, and by a diverging road crossed a rude bridge ; and here the little gorge through which the brook was running, with its large, grey boulders and its arching trees, beguiled us from our purpose of a longer stroll, and led us down the banks, close to its mimic flood. Here we held communion with the spirit of the brook. Here, too, we played the simple game of "tuning the brook," by damming its waters where they rush through some narrow crevice in the rocks, and drawing from the remonstrating stream a new musical note. Still strolling up-stream, over rocks and little ledges, we found within a few rods of our first halting place another shady nook which revealed a totally new aspect of our stream. That is the charm of a brook. It means variety, change, new vistas and new phases of nature

along its whole course. It is the analogue of life. It is human experience foreshadowed in lower nature. And under a spreading tree we talked of the deep things of life, and opened Emerson's poems, and took fresh inspiration from his pages, fraught with a sense of the divine in nature deeper even than Wordsworth's. An hour later we again moved on, this time making a stage of at least forty feet, when we found a sunlit pool where we laved our feet, while the minnows played about them, nibbling furtively at our toes, and the big turtle, whose hole was under an adjacent boulder, came out at intervals to get his breath and to scowl his fear and disapproval on us, trespassers that we were, and poachers in his front yard.

A week later, travelling this same road, we passed still farther up the brook, to where it winds like the classic Meander through sunny meadows, where the alders and the willows grow, and where the cattle love to come and stand, midleg deep, in its stream. And later still, the photographer of our party tramped to the brook's source, up on the hills, and brought away a picture of its headwaters. But sweetest of all our memories will be that bright morning when we wandered to the brookside, with a little child for company, and lay stretched on a greensward shaded by the meeting boughs of a maple and a butternut, while she played like a baby naiad in the stream, and the brook sang, and the trees whispered, and the birds hopped on branches

close beside us, and the kingfisher from down-stream dropped in to call, and the tenant frog stared at us from his pool, and the oxen in the next lot sent looks of fellowship across the stone wall, and we seemed to blend our lives with that of the brook, and for each of us, child, man, and woman, the poet's word was true :

“Beauty through my senses stole ;  
I yielded myself to the perfect whole.”

I suppose all this prattle about the brook seems very aimless and short of the mark to my friends the fishermen ; and they will doubtless feel a wondering disdain for a man who can waste time on a brook without a rod and line. Yet I think I have fished well in New England's brooks, and have brought home as much as they, though I never cast a fly or killed a trout.

“Hast thou named all the birds without a gun ?  
Loved the wood-rose and left it on its stalk ?

Oh, be my friend, and teach me to be thine.”



