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Author(s): Walter Woodburn Hyde

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THE ANCIENT APPRECIATION OF MOUNTAIN SCENERY

BY WALTER WOODBURN HYDE
University of Pennsylvania

The question of the Greco-Roman appreciation of nature has been the subject of discussion ever since Alexander von Humboldt laid the foundation for its study in his *Kosmos*.¹ Because so few notices of scenery are to be found in the extant literatures, it has been assumed pretty generally that the Greeks and Romans felt little attraction for the beauties of rugged nature. On the contrary, it has been argued that the appreciation of the majesty of the mountains and the grandeur of the sea is wholly of modern origin, a development of northern romanticism. Thus a fundamental difference has been assumed to exist between the ancient and modern attitude toward nature. It will be interesting to consider this thesis so far as it is concerned with mountain scenery.

Some writers have denied to the Greeks of the classical age any appreciation of scenery. Thus Tozer has said of the post-Homeric period that "the engrossing character of city life, the fullness of enjoyment furnished by literature and the games, and the way in which man was regarded as the centre of all things, left no room for the admiration of scenery."² Others have limited this admiration to the gentler delights of rural and sylvan scenes. Thus Ruskin, to whom we are indebted more than to any other for the current views about Greek landscape, has said: "They [the Greeks] shrank with dread or hatred from all the ruggedness of lower nature—from the wrinkled forest bank and the jagged hill-crest, and irregular, inorganic storm of sky; looking to these for the most part as adverse powers, and taking pleasure only in such portions

¹ Book II, pp. 372 f. (English rendering by Otté); the first two volumes of *Kosmos* were published in 1845-47; Otté's translation appeared in 1849-68; the second edition in 1880-83.

² *Lectures on the Geography of Greece*, p. 173.

of the lower world as were at once conducive to the rest and health of the human frame, and in harmony with the laws of its gentler beauty."¹ Of Homer's attitude toward landscape he also wrote: "As far as I recollect, without a single exception, every Homeric landscape intended to be beautiful is composed of a fountain, a meadow, and a shady grove."² This sentiment is in harmony with that of Schiller who maintained that Homer took no more delight in describing nature than armor. And yet both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* contain many passages in which the varied charms of nature are characterized with fine poetic feeling. Mountain, sea, forest, and sky furnish subjects for beautiful similes in the *Iliad*, while in the *Odyssey*, with its tamer interests, one has only to recall such striking descriptive touches as that of Calypso's cave,³ or the splendid description of the rocky coast of Scheria.⁴ And in many of the later Homeric hymns there are beautiful descriptions of sea and land; not only of shadowy glens and flowery meads, but of mountain steeps and glades. Who has better caught the delight of the distant hills than the author of the hymn to Pan? The blithesome god is "lord of every crest and mountain peak and rocky path"; with his companion nymphs he "ever ranges over the high white hills," and, "faring through the lofty crags, he climbs the highest peaks whence the flocks are seen below."⁵

No one can deny that the major interest of the Greek was his fellow-man. The whole idea of the independent city-state made the city and not the country the stage of this interest. Socrates might be cited as an extreme example of the Greek ideal, for no one was more completely absorbed in the interests of human life and its perplexities. So he could answer the reproach of his friend Phaedrus that he never left the city, by saying that he was fond of knowledge and could learn nothing from the trees and the country, but only from the people in the city.⁶ In consequence of this predominant human interest, we find that the descriptions of scenery in Greek literature always play a subordinate

¹ *Modern Painters*, Book III, chap. xiii, sec. 15.

² *Ibid.*, sec. 16. ³ v. 63 f. ⁴ v. 400 f.

⁵ From Lang's Translation of Hymn XIX, 6 f. (Baumeister); cf. also the Hymn to the Delian Apollo, I, 22-24.

⁶ Plato *Phaedrus* 230 C-D; cf. *Crito* 53 A.

and incidental rôle. They never become the center of interest but are constantly treated as the "background of human life—the scenery to the play."¹ Such descriptions, found generally in the choral odes of the drama, almost always praise the delights of the more peaceful scenes of nature. A typical example is the description of the hill of Colonus sung by the chorus in the *Oedipus Coloneus*, the passage in which the blind old king approaches his final resting place: "Gleaming Colonus rock, where the thrilling nightingale most loves to sing under the green coverts, remaining constant in the dark brown ivy and the inviolable foliage of the god; the wood with its thousand fruits and leaves, sun-proof, untouchable of any gale."²

Thus it must be conceded that it was the more harmonious aspects of nature which made the greatest appeal to the Greeks. The love of the elemental, the unhumanized in nature, the wild and savage, was, as we shall see, only embryonic with them. Admiration for the grand and sublime, as we feel it in our sentiment for mountain scenery, the beauty of sterile cliffs and rugged crags and wastes of snow, hardly existed then. When one remembers the physical contour of Greece, how the whole country is a network of mountains and hills, it does seem strange that these features received so little attention from Greek poets.³ There is but one great description of mountain scenery in classical Greek poetry, and that gives us the idea that the mountains were looked upon with aversion as barren and repulsive wastes. In the *Prometheus* Aeschylus transports us to "earth's limit," to the "sky-piercing rocks" and the "star-neighbored peaks" in the neighborhood of the Caucasus.⁴ He depends for his effect less on stage scenery and the "thunder-mill" than on the force of the language in which he describes the rock world. The play closes amid the convulsion of earthquake and storm, a description almost as vivid as the flashes

¹ Palgrave, *Landscape in Poetry from Homer to Tennyson*; cf. also Dickinson, *Greek View of Life*, p. 193.

² 670 f. (Jebb); other examples are Euripides' *Bacchae* 1051 f.; Aristophanes' *Nubes* 275 f., etc.

³ For passages see von Humboldt, *op. cit.*, and the essay on *The Mountains in Greek Poetry*, by Norman Young.

⁴ Cf. lines 19-20, 719-23; final scene, 1080 f.

of lightning—one of the grandest in the whole range of literature. But we must remember that it was the poet's dramatic purpose to make the scene of Prometheus' punishment as terrible as possible and so to transport his audience

Far o'er Scythia's pathless plains
Ne'er by foot of mortal trod.

But because there is so little appreciation of the ruggedness of lower nature reflected in Greek literature, we must not go to the other extreme and assume that the Greeks were indifferent to it. It would have been strange, indeed, if the many-sided imaginative Greeks, who "possessed the keenest intellect and the finest sense of beauty of any that the world has seen,"¹ had not appreciated their wonderful scenery in all its varying phases. For it is doubtful if any land exists where the visual stimuli to the imagination are greater than in Greece: "Scenery so richly diversified, a land beyond all others various in features and elements, mountains with their bases plunged into the sea, valleys intersected by great rivers, rich plains and meadows inlaid between the hill ranges, deeply indented shores, promontories wood-clad or temple-crowned looking out over the many-islanded Aegean: around it on every side seas so beautiful, above it such a canopy of sky, changing through every hour and every season, and calling forth from sea and land every color which sunlight and gloom can elicit."² Amid such surroundings, a far less gifted people could not have failed to develop a love and sympathy for it all. That the Greeks did have such feelings for their scenery is evidenced by the wealth of legend which haunted every corner of their country; and the picturesque location of many a temple on sea-cliff, mountain side, and in romantic woodland makes it impossible not to believe that they were possessed of a well-developed sense of natural beauty, even if definite proofs of such a feeling are lacking in their literature,³ and if the feeling was vastly more limited in its scope with them than with us. Just

¹ Tozer, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

² From Shairp, *Poetic Interpretation of Nature*, p. 142; cf. a similar appreciation by A. Philippson, "Griechenland und seine Stellung im Orient," *Geogr. Ztschr.*, III (1897), Heft 4.

³ In this connection cf. Professor Gildersleeve, *Amer. Jour. Phil.* IV, (1913) under "Brief Mention."

how great this appreciation was, we cannot tell, but we are safe in saying with Shairp that "there is hardly a tone of sentiment which nature in modern times has evoked, of which some faint prelude at least might not be found among them."

It is probably true that in the earliest times the Greeks viewed their mountains with feelings only of aversion and awe, as barren tracts haunted by evil spirits and so to be crossed only under direst necessity. Such wastes would naturally be looked upon as fit places for the erection of altars to appease the angry powers of nature. It is quite possible that this was the origin of the custom, continued all through Greek history, of erecting altars and temples on the tops of mountains to Zeus and other gods.¹ Some have seen a justification of this explanation in the names of certain of the Greek hills which seem to have preserved the memory of the time when they were viewed with awe and even terror. Thus Maenalus, the Arcadian mountain haunt of Pan, simply means the "wild" or "tempestuous"; Ceraunia is the "thunder" range; Tymphrestus is the "whirlwind"; Ptoon is the "terrifying" hill, while Phrikion, a little-known eminence near Thermopylae, exactly answers to the Swiss "Schreckhorn."² But we must be on our guard in laying too much stress on these etymologies, for there are many others which show that the early Greeks quite as often let their lighter humor play in naming their hills after the fancied likeness to birds or well-known animals and objects. Thus, to mention only a few, we have Geranea the "crane," Corax the "raven," Corydallos the "lark," and Cocygium the "cuckoo"; we also have Aegaleos the "goat," Lycaeus the "wolf," Oneion the "ass," and Arachnaeus the "spider's web," while Cithaeron is the "guitar" and Harma (in the

¹ Thus an altar and temple were dedicated to Zeus on Gargaros, the top of Ida (*Il.* xxii. 171; cf. viii. 48); a temple was dedicated to the same god on Atabyrium (Tabor) on Rhodes (Pindar *Ol. od.* vii. 159-61) of which the ruins have been found. Other altars of Zeus stood on Athos (Aeschylus *Agam.* 285; cf. Mela ii, 2. 31), on Oeta (Sophocles *Trach.* 1191-92) and Parnes (Paus. i. 32. 2); Zeus and Hera had altars on Arachnaeus (Paus. ii. 25. 10); Artemis had a sanctuary on Artemisium (*ibid.* ii. 25. 3), Helios on Taletum, a peak of Taÿgetus (*ibid.* iii. 20. 4), and Apollo on Olympus (Plutarch *Aem. Paul.* 15), etc. The custom has never died out, for the Greeks of today have dedicated most of their peaks to the prophet Elijah (Hagios Elias, not to be confounded with the old sun-god Helios), and cairns of stones or chapels are to be found on most of them.

² Cf. Tozer, *op. cit.*, p. 50, for such etymologies.

range of Parnes) the "chariot." In any case, if this was the first attitude of the Greeks toward their hills, constant familiarity with them in course of time made them forget their earlier dread. For from the time of Homer down we have evidence that they were put to very practical uses, such as watchtowers and telegraph stations in the history of warfare.¹ By the end of the fourth century B.C., the mountains had aroused the scientific interest of the Greeks, for beginning with Dicaearchus, the pupil of Aristotle, we find that many attempts were made to calculate their heights.² Still later we read of mountain ascents being made for scientific purposes,³ and lastly even for the pleasure of obtaining a wide panoramic view.⁴

¹ The evidence has been collected by Professor A. C. Merriam, "Telegraphing among the Ancients" (*Papers of the Amer. Arch. Inst.*, III [1890], 1-32); cf. H. F. Tozer, *History of Ancient Geography*, pp. 328 f., and Hyde, "The Mountains of Greece," *Bull. Phila. Geog. Soc.* XIII (1915), No. 2, pp. 13 f.; No. 3, pp. 20 f.

² Dicaearchus wrote a book, accompanied by maps, on the topography of Greece, which is known to us only through notices in later writers; Pliny (*H.N.* ii. 162) records that he computed the height of Pelion as 1,250 paces, or 6,250 feet, whereas the real height is 5,310 feet; Geminus (*Elem. Astron.* xvii. 5) says he computed the height of Cyllene as under 15 stades, or 9,000 feet, though the actual height is 7,789 feet; the same author (*ibid.*) records that Dicaearchus calculated Atabyrium on Rhodes as a little under 10 stades, or 6,000 feet, though this mountain is actually but 4,070 feet. Apollodorus (*Steph. Byz. s.v. Κυλλήνη*) reckoned Cyllene as 80 feet less than 9 stades, or 5,320 feet; Strabo (viii. 8. 1) says some writers calculated it at 20 stades, or 12,000 feet, and others at 15 stades, or 9,000 feet; Xenagoras (quoted by Plutarch *Aem. Paul.* 15) reckoned the distance to Apollo's shrine at the top of Olympus as 10 stades, or 6,000 feet, whereas this mountain is 9,754 feet high. Strabo (viii, 6, 21) made the most careful computation of all, in giving 12 stades, or 2,100 feet, as the height of the Acro-Corinth, which is only 213 feet in excess of the real height; cf. Tozer, *op. cit.*, pp. 335-37; and Hyde, *op. cit.*, No. 3, pp. 24 f.

³ The best example is Strabo's account of the ascent of Aetna (vi. 2. 8).

⁴ E.g., Strabo's account of Mount Argaeus in Cappadocia, which he says was ascended sometimes for the view (xii. 2. 7). The exedra on Mount Tmolus, mentioned by Strabo (xiii. 4. 5) and the belvedere (ἑβόρας) on Taygetus, mentioned by Pausanias (iii, 20. 4; cf. Stasinus *Cypria* v. 117-18), were probably used for pleasure as much as for military purposes. Strabo (viii. 6. 21) mentions ascending Acro-Corinth and describes the view from the top; Livy (xl. 21-22) describes the ascent of the Haemus (Balkans) by Philip V of Macedon, partly for reconnoitering and partly for the view; he says it was commonly believed that from the top both the Euxine and Adriatic seas were visible, as also the Danube and the Alps. Strabo (vii. 5. 1) quotes Polybius as stating that the Euxine and Adriatic could be seen from the top of Haemus, though he considers this impossible. Diodorus (xvii. 7. 5-7) describes the effect of sunrise from the top of Ida. On this subject cf. Tozer, *op. cit.*, pp. 322-23.

There is evidence, then, that the Greeks came to look upon their mountains with feelings of companionship and sympathy, although these emotions were not set forth poetically in Wordsworthian detail. In the words of Gilbert Murray: "It is true that there is little description of scenery in the literature of the ancient Greeks. They did not describe forests and mountains; they worshipped them and built temples in them. Their love for nature was that of the mountaineer and seaman, who does not talk much about sea or mountain, but sickens and pines if he is taken away from them. And even the literature, if free from actual descriptions of scenery, is full of flowers and garlands, and shot through by the light of the stars and moon—things that we have superseded and seldom see, but that were familiar if half-divine companions to every Greek."¹ The reason for the absence of such descriptions, hinted at in the foregoing quotation, lay deep in the very nature of the Greek, in the psychology of his race. Zimmern² has shown that landscape poetry, like landscape painting, can come into existence only when a people is able to see itself objectively in its surroundings and no longer feel itself part and parcel of them. Though they had long speculated upon the inner nature of man, the Greeks, at least to the close of the fifth century B.C., had not fully entered upon the stage of self-consciousness in their attitude toward their natural environment. Hard it is for us moderns, sophisticated by the experience of all the centuries that lie between us and them and forever denied the simplicity and freshness of view of that wonderful race, to understand this fundamental difference of attitude. For our view of nature is relatively objective, while theirs was subjective. As Zimmern says: "Like all simple folk, they take a knowledge of their scenery and surroundings for granted in all who listen to them. The Mediterranean landscape,

¹ From the introduction to *Greek and English Tragedy: A Contrast*. Ruskin expresses himself in a similar fashion: "The Greeks lived in the midst of the most beautiful nature, and were as familiar with blue sea, clear air, and sweet outlines of mountain, as we are with brick walls, black smoke, and level fields. This perfect familiarity rendered all such scenes of natural beauty unexciting, if not indifferent to them, by lulling and overwearying the imagination as far as it was concerned with such things" (*op. cit.*, chap. xiii, sec. 14).

² *The Greek Commonwealth* (1911).

like the institution of the City-State, forms a permanent background to Greek life and thought. Its influence is omnipresent, but it is seldom expressed."¹

So one must enter deeply into the life and spirit of the ancient Greeks before he can realize this basic difference. Even the northern poets who have sung of the south have done so for the most part as visitors, to whom the real spirit of the country, though arousing their appreciation, has remained largely exotic and has not entered deeply into their natures.² Where men of imagination have failed, men of more ordinary mold are doomed to misunderstand. It needs more than one fleeting visit to the city of the violet crown to understand why Pericles said the Athenians, on beholding the power of their city day by day, grew enamored of it. As Zimmern says, one should stand on Taygetus at night before he can fully grasp the meaning of Alcman's song:

The mountain summits sleep: glens, cliffs and caves
 Are silent—all the black earth's reptile brood—
 The bees—the wild beasts of the mountain wood:
 In depths beneath the dark red ocean's waves
 Its monsters rest, whilst wrapped in bower and spray,
 Each bird is hush'd that stretch'd its pinions to the day.³

It is only late in their history, when the Greeks had begun to pass this simple subjective period, that we find them describing their mountains, calculating their heights, and ascending them for scientific purposes. Later still we hear of ascents for other reasons, for pleasure and even for adventure—which is surely the prelude to the modern romantic interest in mountains and mountain conquest.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

² The writer just mentioned shows (pp. 14-15) how the gulf between north and south cannot be bridged even by a lifetime. Often a northern invader into Greece would finally return home because of home-sickness. Many a Frankish baron of mediaeval Greece would abandon his domain and go home to die by the Rhine or Loire. Thus Otho de la Roche, the first feudal lord of Attica and Boeotia, who "had the Acropolis for his castle and the Parthenon for his minster," left all in his old age and returned with his son to Burgundy to die. Cf. also Miller, *The Latins in the Levant*, pp. 68, 74, and 91-92.

³ Frag. 60 (Campbell).

With the less imaginative Romans the case was different. For with the exception of a very few of their finer spirits, they seem to have continued throughout their history insensible to the attraction of mountain scenery. When we consider the place which the Alps and Apennines take in the landscape of Italy, it is strange that so little notice of them appears in the Latin poets. Though familiar with many of the Alpine passes¹ long before the Christian era, the Romans never overcame their early feelings of fear and repulsion. They always regarded the mountains as inconvenient obstacles to commerce and conquest. Wherever they are mentioned, they are invariably accompanied by such disparaging epithets as "inhospitable," "remote," "cold," "frightful," "horrid," "bristling,"

¹ Polybius (*apud Strab.* iv. 6. 12), of the second century B.C., mentions four Alpine passes, the Ligurian coast route (Riviera), the roads through the Taurini (Mont Genève), the Salassi (Little St. Bernard), and the Rhaeti. Strabo (iv. 6.6) devotes an entire chapter to the Alps, giving an account of the roads constructed by Augustus, the tribes inhabiting the Alpine regions, and discussing the dangers in crossing them from robbers, avalanches, etc. From him and other sources it seems certain that the following passes were known to the Romans: (1) Ligurian coast road, known as early as the second century B.C. (cf. Polybius *loc. cit.* and Val. Max. i. 6. 7); Augustus in 12 B.C. built the Via Iulia Augusta over it (*CIL*, XII, 5454-55). (2) Mont Genève (*Alpis Cottia*) over which Polybius says Hannibal crossed (see discussion in Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie*, I, 1605-6). It was known certainly as early as 100 B.C. (cf. Strabo iv. 1. 3. in connection with Pliny *H.N.* ii. 244); in 75 B.C. Pompey opened this route and in 58 B.C. Caesar crossed it, the "proximum iter in ulteriorem Galliam"; Cottius completed the road in 3 B.C. (*Amm.* xv. 10. 2). (3) Little St. Bernard (*Alpis Graia*), one of the earliest known routes. It was the chief road into Gallia Comata until Pompey opened the route over Mont Genève; D. Brutus crossed it in 43 B.C. (*Cic. Fam.* x. 23 and xi. 23); Strabo (iv. 6. 7) says it was made serviceable for carriages under Augustus. Remains of buildings (including a temple to [?] Jupiter) have been found near the top (*Notizie degli Scavi*, 1883, p. 7; 1884, p. 46; and cf. C. Promis, *Antichità di Aosta*, 1862, pp. 115 f). (4) Great St. Bernard (*Alpis Poenina* or *Mons Jovis*), a very old route in Strabo's day, though not suited for carriages (iv. 6. 7). In 57 B.C. Caesar sent his legate Galba to open the route and free it from the extortions of merchants (*Bell. Gall.* iii. 1-6). Remains of the old road, cut in the rock, are visible, near the top, as also remnants of the temple of Jupiter Poeninus (earlier than the time of Tiberius) which were excavated in 1890-93 (*Notizie degli Scavi*, and C. Promis, *op. cit.*). It was first reported that Gallic coins and objects of the Iron age (fourth and fifth centuries B.C.) had been found (*Notizie degli Scavi*, 1891, p. 81) but later denied (*ibid.*, 1894, p. 44). (5) Splügen (*Cuneus Aureus*); (6) Julier; Roman coins and two round milestones of slate, dating from the time of Augustus, were found in this pass; Augustus constructed a military road from Chiavenna to Coire over the Maloja and Julier routes. (7) Reschenscheideck (*Via Claudia Augusta*) was known from 46-47 A.D. (*CIL*, V, 938). (8) Brenner, the lowest Alpine pass (4,495 feet), over which the

“shaggy.”¹ The Roman dread is also evidenced by the many offerings made to local deities which have been found in the Alpine passes. For not only were armies constantly crossing from Italy into Gaul, Helvetia, Rhaetia, and the eastern regions of Europe, but great numbers of traders. Pious travellers would leave votive tablets inscribed with their names to propitiate the local deities or to commemorate a safe crossing.² Doubtless a great deal of the general dread of such routes can be ascribed to the physical difficulties of travel—to the presence of brigandage and wild beasts in the Alpine fastnesses and also to the inability of the Romans to withstand the cold of high altitudes.³

successive Teutonic invasions into Italy passed. Etruscan objects prove its antiquity, though the first inscription which mentions it dates from 195 A.D. (*CIL*, III, 5980); the carriage road was built in 1772. (9) Radstädter Tauern (and Katschberg), (via the Plöcken, Monte Croce); Roman inscribed milestones have been found here (*CIL*, 5713-27). (10) Rottenmannen Tauern (via the Pontebba), the route into Noricum. (11) Birnbaumer Wald (*Alpis Iulia* or *Ocro*), known from republican days, from the founding of Aquileia in 181 B.C. (cf. Livy xxxix. 22, etc.).

Several other routes have been assumed but cannot be proved; thus the Simplon, because of an inscription found below Domo d'Ossola (*CIL*, V, 6649); the pass is first mentioned in 1235; the St. Gothard, because of inscriptions *Quinto*, *Decimo* found near Airolo; it is first mentioned, though without a name, in 1236; the mule path in 1293 and the hospice in 1331; from the latter date to the nineteenth century it was the most frequented pass in the Central Alps; the Septimer, which shows traces of pavement from the fourteenth century only; the Lukmanier, first mentioned in 965; the Bernardino (an offshoot of the Splügen) in 941; the Mont Cenis in 756. That the Romans even crossed glacier passes is shown by the fact that Roman coins have been found on top of the Theodule above Zermatt.

On the subject of Alpine passes see F. von Duhn, “Die Benutzung der Alpenstrassen im Altertum”; *N. Heidelberger Jahrb.*, II (1892), 55-92; Dubi, “Die Römerstrassen in den Alpen,” *Jahrb. Schweiz. Alp. Clubs*, XIX, 381-416; XX, 344-63, XXI, 323-41. For a convenient summary, see Pauly-Wissowa, *op. cit.*, I, 1604-10 (the basis of this note).

¹ E.g., *montibus aviis* (Hor. *Od.* i. 23.2); *montes inaccessi* (Pliny *H.N.* vi. 28. 32); *lapidosi* (Ov. *Met.* i. 44); *capita aspera* (Vergil *Aen.* vi. 360); *Alpes gelidae* (Lucretius 1-183; cf. Hor. *Od.* i. 21. 6); *celsus Appenninus* (Hor. *Epod.* xvi. 29); *nivalis* (Hor. *Od.* iii. 23. 9; cf. *Carmen Saecul.* 69); *saevae Alpes* (Juvenal x, 166).

² Many such tablets of bronze have been found at the top of the Great St. Bernard and are now in the museum in the hospice there; the oldest datable one is from the age of Tiberius (*Notizie degli Scavi, passim*, and especially for 1890, p. 294). A tablet discovered in the Little St. Bernard, and now in the British Museum, reads “Poenino Sacrum P. Blattius Creticus,” thus being devoted to Jupiter Poeninus, the local deity of the Pennine chain.

³ In this connection see the charming essay of Lowell *On a Good Word for Winter*.

Furthermore, a Latin writer rarely mentions individual peaks—another indication of the Roman lack of interest. Perhaps no word in the language was more elastic in its meaning than *mons*; for it was applied to designate any eminence from the débris piled up by a river flood and the trivial height of Mons Sacer to the Apennines and the chains of the Alps.¹ When the word was used in the latter sense, a whole range and not individual summits was invariably intended.² In Greece, many summits were isolated—as Olympus, Ossa, Parnassus, Cyllene—and were therefore readily distinguished from ranges proper. But the great chain which extends the length of the Italian peninsula was always known as Apenninus, and few of its peaks were ever regarded separately, while in the Alps, a pass was not distinguished in thought from a whole range.³

The Latin poets had little praise to bestow on the mountains. Catullus, who was a native of Verona and lived for a time at Sermione on the Lago di Garda in full view of the Alps, never mentions the grandest features of that landscape. He is too absorbed in themes of love to take an abiding interest in nature, though at times he feels its spell, as in those artless lines in which he expresses his emotion on returning to Sermione, beginning, “Paene insularum, Sirmio, insularumque ocellae.”⁴ But even here he says nothing of the Alps. Vergil, though born and reared in sight of the foothills of both Alps and Apennines has no praise for the mountains. Sometimes he speaks of their snowy summits, and in one passage singles out a special peak, the “pine-clad Vesulus” (Monte Viso). Only once does he catch the delight and power of the distant hills, in

¹ For uses of *mons* cf. the following: “debris” of a river flood (Verg. *Georg.* iii. 254); heaps or masses of silver (Plaut. *Mil.* iv. 2. 73); of armor (Sil. x. 549); of stones (Juv. iii. 258; Stat. *Theb.* i. 145); even of grief (Plaut. *Most.* ii. 1. 6); Vergil in one place (*Aen.* xii, 687) refers it to a rock, in another to a wave (*Aen.* i. 105), while Cicero (*Pis.* xxi. 48) calls a tall building near Tusculum a *mons*, etc.

² E.g., Mons Jura.

³ E.g., *Alpis Poenia* (Great St. Bernard), *Alpis Cottia* (Mont Genève), *Alpis Graia* (Little St. Bernard). It might be added that the Roman idea of a *mons* as a pass existed in the Alps until the formation of Alpine clubs, when an accurate knowledge of the mountains had been gained. To this day we speak of Mont Cenis, Monte Moro, Mont Genève, etc., when we mean the passes through those mountains.

⁴ xxxi. 1-2.

the lines in which he compares Aeneas exulting before battle with Athos or Eryx or

Father Apennine himself, when he roars with his waving
Oaks and rejoices, lifting himself with his snowy head into the air.¹

With Horace the case is still worse. Though he is continually leaving Rome to enjoy the peaceful solitude of his little farm in the wild Sabine hills, and though he receives the inspiration for some of his best poetry from this retreat, he never recalls its more rugged surroundings. Once, indeed, he mentions Lucretilis,² which he says is *amoenus*—charming; and he singles out Algidus³ and Soracte,⁴ but he was far too much in love with the gentle features of field and woodland, with his vineyards and olive groves, his fountains and streams, to give attention to the beauties of the Italian mountains. Lucretius was the only Roman poet to praise the hills. Led by his interest in the elemental forces of nature, he visited the mountain solitudes to muse on the effects of clouds and storms. He reproaches selfish nature for seizing half of the earth's empire for her mountains, rocks, forests, swamps, and seas.⁵ He seems to have made ascents that he might observe the moving beauty of the clouds.⁶

Among the poets, the Roman feeling of aversion is best disclosed by Silius; in a passage of the *Punica*, in describing Hannibal's

¹ *Aen.* xii. 701-3.

² *Od.* i. 17.1; this is probably Monte Gennaro, the highest of the Sabine hills (4,285 feet). Horace says its shades could allure even Faunus himself from Mount Lycaeus to shelter the poet's flocks from heat and rain.

³ E.g., *Od.* i. 21.6; iii. 23.9; iv. 4. 58; he speaks of its black woods of oak "nigrae feraci frondis in Algido." It is now known as Monte Compatri, Algido or Maschio d'Ariano (2925 feet).

⁴ E.g., *Od.* i. 9. He uses the epithet *candidus* of this peak, now known as Monte S. Oreste (2,420 feet).

⁵ *De Rerum Natura* v. 201-3.

⁶ In vi. 469 he says: "montis cum ascendimus altos"; for his appreciation of clouds see iv. 133 f.; vi. 189 f. and 459 f.

Of course it would be wrong to generalize too much from the silence of most of the Roman poets. Doubtless a few men then, as in every age since, felt a love for the distant hills, even though they did not care to traverse them and did not leave their impressions behind in literary form.

crossing of the Alps, he descants on the hardships of the Carthaginian soldiers in these words:

“Here everything is wrapped in eternal frost, white with snow and held in the grip of primaeval ice. The mountain steepes are so stiff with cold that although they tower up into the sky, the warmth of the sunshine cannot soften their hardened rime. Deep as the Tartarean abyss of the underworld lies beneath the ground, even so far does the earth here mount into the air, shutting out with its shade the light of heaven. No Spring comes to this region, nor the charms of Summer. Misshapen Winter dwells alone on these dread crests, and guards them as her perpetual abode. Thither from all sides she gathers the thunder clouds mingled with hail. Here, too, in this Alpine home, have the winds and the tempests fixed their furious dominion. Men grow dizzy amid the lofty crags, and the mountains disappear in the clouds. Were Athos piled on Taurus, Rhodope on Mimas, Ossa on Pelion, and Othrys on Haemus, they would all yield to the Alps.”¹

This passage recalls Livy’s account of the crossing of Hannibal, which in fact furnished the raw material for the poet’s fancy. The picture which the historian drew of the horrors of the lower Alps—based on the account of Polybius (an eyewitness) and his own imagination (for Livy never saw them)—is very characteristic. After exhausting his powers of description, he ends by adding “and other terrors more horrible to see than to describe.”² There is little doubt that this account of Livy had its influence in strengthening the Roman repugnance to the mountains.

Most of the other prose writers were content, like the poets, to leave out all reference to mountain scenery. Suetonius recounts how Caesar, while crossing the Alps from Cisalpine Gaul to regain his army, passed the time composing a treatise on language.³ This anecdote is the best commentary on the general indifference. Cicero has left us his idea of the beauty of the hills, which harmonizes with the Roman sentiment. Speaking of the influence of habit, he remarks that “we even take pleasure in mountainous

¹ iii. 479–95; translated by Sir Archibald Geikie in his *The Love of Nature among the Romans* (1912), p. 293.

² “Cetera visu quam dictu foediora” (xix. 32). Strabo, in the passage on the Alps already mentioned, also gives a graphic account of the rocks, precipices, and avalanches.

³ *Julius* x. 56; the title of the work was *De analogia*.

and wooded regions, if we dwell in them a long time.”¹ He represents his friend Atticus as praising his island retreat in the river Fibrenus, a tributary of the Liris, and saying how greatly surprised he was on arriving where he had expected to find only mountains and rocks.² The younger Pliny praises the view of Como from his villas, but does not remark the mountains which furnish its essential charm, nor does he mention the Apennines in describing the view from his retreat on the Tiber, except to say that their summits were wooded. The dictum of Quintillian that “beauty belongs to sea-views, to plains, and to pleasant localities,”³ summarizes the Roman ideal of scenery. A description like that of Vergil, in which the boat of Aeneas ascends the winding Tiber, glides beneath the overhanging trees, and cuts the forests reflected upon the surface, yields the true Roman delight in the quieter moods of nature:

Olli remigio noctemque diemque fatigant
 Et longos superant flexus variisque teguntur
 Arboribus viridisque secant placido aequore silvas.⁴

Of similar sentiment are the lines in the Tenth Eclogue in which Gallus, lamenting his faithless Lycoris, extolls the charms of nature near to his heart:

Hic gelidi fontes, hic mollia prata, Lycori,
 Hic nemus; hic ipso tecum consumerer aevo.⁵

Our own Milton has struck the ancient note in these lines on his blindness:

Yet not the more
 Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
 Clear Spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill.⁶

Save in Lucretius, we read of no mountain ascents by Romans until the time of Hadrian, whose multiform curiosity added this

¹ *De amicitia* 68.

² *De legibus* ii. 1. 2; the *Dialogue on the Laws* (book ii) was held here.

³ “Speciem [laudamus in locis] martitimis, planis, amoenis” (*Instit. Orator.* iii. 7. 27).

⁴ *Aen.* viii. 94-96.

⁵ *Ll.* 42-43.

⁶ *Paradise Lost*, iii. 26-28.

“vertical” kind of travel to his constant wanderings. His biographer Spartian records that he climbed Aetna to see the sunrise.¹ He mentions also his ascent of Mount Casius near Antioch in Syria for the same purpose,² and Arrian says he ascended Theches, the hill named by tradition as the place whence the Ten Thousand, after their retreat through Armenia, first saw the Euxine.³ The account of the ascent of Aetna in the pages of Strabo⁴ has already been mentioned. Seneca wrote a letter to his friend the younger Lucilius, in which he asks the latter, then procurator of Sicily, to ascend the volcano. He had heard that the mountain was dwindling away, for it was said that it could no longer be seen by sailors from so great a distance as before.⁵ The didactic poem *Aetna*, a scientific description of the volcano, has been ascribed to this Lucilius. In the pages of Sallust is to be found a short account of an actual ascent of a rocky hill.⁶ A Ligurian soldier in the army of Marius, while hunting for snails one day, climbed to the top of a cliff which overlooked a Numidian fort that the Roman general had vainly tried to capture. Returning to camp, the soldier led a party up the cliff; by the use of nooses thrown round the rocks and trees, they managed to descend and take the fortress. Such a feat, however, cannot be regarded as a mountain climb of importance, but only as an incident in a military campaign.

¹ *Hadrianus* xiii. 3. The Roman ruin which stands high up on the shoulder of the mountain and is now called “Torre del filosofo,” because of the popular notion that it had something to do with the legendary death of the philosopher Empedocles, is doubtless the remnant of the refuge house built for the emperor’s use; cf. Friedländer, *Sittengeschichte Roms*, II, 203.

² *Hadrianus* xiv. 3.

³ Periplus i; cf. Xenophon, *Anab.* 4, 7. 21.

⁴ vi. 2. 8. ⁵ *Ep.* lxxix. 2. ⁶ *Jugurtha* 93-94.