

Extract - The Folly

When I first went to Faringdon, the Folly was not even so much as a name to me 'You must go and see the Folly; you will like that. 'No one told me what I was going to see. So I climbed a hill to the Folly, and found that it was nothing more and nothing less, than a group of isolated fir trees, upon an eminence which forms a landmark to all the country round. Wonderful fir trees they are- of great height, with huge trunks and spreading tops. The lower branches are nearly all gone, pulled off doubtless for firewood. I know how it is done. As I came up the hill there were three little girls and a bigger boy all busily engaged in this mischief. The boy threw a noose over the branch, almost now the only one within reach; then he and the three little girls hung upon the rope and pulled. A few minutes longer, a little more pulling, and the branch would have broken. But I appeared upon the scene. I begged them to desist, which they did, only probably till my back was turned. The branch, I felt sure was doomed; the children would return to their work of destruction, and all my protestations be wasted.

The grove of fir trees is round, like a crown upon the top of the hill. Underneath the trees you walk over the most deliciously soft turf, cropped just closely enough to be pleasant to the feet. Here much courting goes on; the place is made for it. There are rough seats, and a path cut right across the grass and another round the hill. And the hills misty and grey by reason of their distance.

Upon a clear day ' The snow-white courser stretching o'er the green' is distinctly visible- that is, if you know where to look for it. For all the rest embraced by that wonderful panoramic view I must refer you to the effusion called 'Faringdon hill,' by Henry James s Pye, Poet Laureate, of whom more hereafter. For myself, shall I make this confession?- I had no wish or any desire whatever for anything so prosaic as to know the names of places within my sight. The view itself, the grey hills and the beautiful country in between, was enough. It would have afforded me absolutely no satisfaction to know that from the Folly I could see seven counties, or twelve, or even twenty. For a while I sat upon one of those benches, very uncomfortably, as far as physical ease was concerned, I made a discovery, or rather a revelation came to me. The air was full of twitterings; above my head in the fir trees a couple of wood pigeons cooed continually. I became sensible of an indescribable vibration thrilling through Nature, a restlessness and movement, an eager stirring of suppressed life.



Thought to be 1920/30s

But the pride they feel in their hill is no novel sensation to them. The sentiment expressed by the old man as he walked beside me down the path that he ' shouldn't think there was another such hill in the kingdom', is probably largely the feeling amongst the natives of the little Berkshire town. They do not take its existence as a matter of course with; if you question them on the subject you will find they have theories about it. Much mystery surrounds the Folly. There are many traditions and stories connected with it, the most obviously impossible one being that a member of the Pye family, once great folk in Faringdon, planted a tree of it every day! 'There goes Pye and his Folly' the people are reported to have said as Mr Pye was seen going up the hill upon his daily mission. The story may have some foundation in fact; it certainly possesses no connection with the Folly. The Pyles came to Faringdon in 1621, and there is extant an old picture of Faringdon in 1630, in which trees of the Folly appear to be almost as tall as they are now. The clump crowning Jasper's Hill, another height not far from the Folly, which was cut down about 30 years ago, also appears in the picture. No; we must go farther back than this: the mystery surrounding the Folly is no so easily swept away. The suggestion that the origin of the name is simply *folium* certainly does not dispose of it. Long ago, ages before Alfred fought his battles, before even this bit of country formed part of the habitable world, there was perhaps a great forest here, of which glorious group of trees alone remains. The supposition only deepens the mystery. And the pride of Faringdon folk in their Folly is justified and comprehensible.

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