

NOTES BY THE WAY

I. THE WEATHER-WISE MUSKRAT

I am more than half persuaded that the muskrat is a wise little animal, and that on the subject of the weather, especially, he possesses some secret that I should be glad to know. In the fall of 1878 I noticed⁵ that he built unusually high and massive nests. I noticed them in several different localities. In a shallow, sluggish pond by the roadside, which I used to pass daily in my walk, two nests were in process of construction throughout the month of November. The¹⁰ builders worked only at night, and I could see each day that the work had visibly advanced. When there was a slight skim of ice over the pond, this was broken up about the nests, with trails through it in different directions where the material had been brought. The¹⁵ houses were placed a little to one side of the main channel, and were constructed entirely of a species of coarse wild grass that grew all about. So far as I could see, from first to last they were solid masses of grass, as if the interior cavity or nest was to be²⁰ excavated afterwards, as doubtless it was. As they emerged from the pond they gradually assumed the shape of a miniature mountain, very bold and steep on the south side, and running down a long, gentle grade to the surface of the water on the north. One²⁵ could see that the little architect hauled all his material up this easy slope, and thrust it out boldly around the other side. Every mouthful was distinctly defined. After they were two feet or more above the