

in time. I might have guessed at an earlier date that this was a delusion, since the feeling had grown in strength with the years, but it was only after I took to reading at the beginning of my sixteenth year that I discovered its true character. One of the books I read then for the first time was White's *Selborne*, given to me by an old friend of our family, a merchant in Buenos Ayres, who had been accustomed to stay a week or two with us once a year when he took his holiday. He had been on a visit to Europe, and one day, he told me, when in London on the eve of his departure, he was in a bookshop, and seeing this book on the counter and glancing at a page or two, it occurred to him that it was just the right thing to get for that bird-loving boy out on the pampas. I read and re-read it many times, for nothing so good of its kind had ever come to me, but it did not reveal to me the secret of my own feeling for Nature—the feeling of which I was becoming more and more conscious, which was a mystery to me especially at certain moments, when it would come upon me with a sudden rush. So powerful it was, so unaccountable, I was actually afraid of it, yet I would go out of my way to seek it. At the hour of sunset I would go out half a mile or so from the house, and sitting on the dry grass with hands clasped round my knees, gaze at the western sky, waiting for it to take me. And I would ask myself: What does it mean? But there was no answer to that in any book concerning the "life and conversation of animals." I found it in other works: in Brown's *Philosophy*—another of the ancient tomes on our shelves—and in an old volume containing