

INTRODUCTION

BY JOHN BURROUGHS

AUDUBON lived in a period of our history which is fast receding from view, and of which the personal memoirs and portraitures are by no means abundant. He was a keen, sympathetic observer not merely of the birds and animals, but of men and things generally; and, though by no means a first-class literary workman, there are yet at times wonderful vividness and truth about some of his off-hand sketches which, of their kind, it would not be easy to match. How clearly the coon-hunter of Kentucky, loading his rifle, stands before one in the following passage:

"The hunter has taken an axe from the wood-pile, and, returning, assures us that the night is clear, and that we shall have rare sport. He blows through his rifle to ascertain that it is clear, examines his flint, and thrusts a feather into the touch-hole. To a leathern bag swung at his side is attached a powder-horn; his sheathed knife is there also; below hangs a narrow strip of home-spun linen. He takes from his bag a bullet, pulls with his teeth the wooden stopper from his powder-horn, lays the ball on one hand, and with the other pours the powder upon it until it is just overtopped. Raising the horn to his mouth, he again closes it with the stopper, and restores it to its place. He introduces the powder into the tube, springs the box of his gun, greases the 'patch' over some wetted tallow, or damps it, then places it on the honeycombed muzzle of his piece. The bullet is placed on the patch over the bore, and pressed with the handle of the knife, which now trims the edges of the linen. The elastic hickory rod, held with both hands, smoothly pushes the ball to its bed: once, twice, thrice has it rebounded. The rifle leaps as it were into the hunter's arms, the feather is drawn from the touch-hole, the powder fills the pan, which is closed. 'Now I am ready,' cries the woodsman."

It is worthy of note that neither of the great American ornithologists was in the strict sense an American. Wilson