

Leaves from the Notebook of an Emigrant Between New York and San Francisco

by Robert Louis Stevenson *from Across the Plains*

Robert Louis Stevenson, a native of Scotland, took a train trip from New York to San Francisco in 1879. This is from the beginning of his trip.

Tuesday.—When I awoke, it was already day; the train was standing idle; I was in the last carriage, and, seeing some others strolling to and fro about the lines, I opened the door and stepped forth, as from a caravan by the wayside. We were near no station, nor even, as far as I could see, within reach of any signal. A green, open, undulating country stretched away upon all sides. Locust trees and a single field of Indian corn gave it a foreign grace and interest; but the contours of the land were soft and English. It was not quite England, neither was it quite France; yet like enough either to seem natural in my eyes. And it was in the sky, and not upon the earth, that I was surprised to find a change. Explain it how you may, and for my part I cannot explain it at all, the sun rises with a different splendour in America and Europe. There is more clear gold and scarlet in our old country mornings; more purple, brown, and smoky orange in those of the new. It may be from habit, but to me the coming of day is less fresh and inspiring in the latter; it has a duskier glory, and more nearly resembles sunset; it seems to fit some subsequential, evening epoch of the world, as though America were in fact, and not merely in fancy, farther from the orient of Aurora and the springs of day. I thought so then, by the railroad side in Pennsylvania, and I have thought so a dozen times since in far distant parts of the continent. If it be an illusion it is one very deeply rooted, and in which my eyesight is accomplice.

Questions

1. Stevenson refers to the “old country” and the “new.” To what is he referring?
2. What does *undulating* mean in this phrase from the text: “A green, open, undulating country stretched away”?
3. Find an example of alliteration in the passage.
4. What do you think “orient of Aurora” means in the following: “as though America were in fact, and not merely in fancy, farther from the orient of Aurora and the springs of day”?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. Idle
2. Strolling
3. Wayside
4. Undulating
5. Contours
6. Splendor
7. Inspiring
8. Accomplice

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1. "When I awoke, it was already day; the train was standing **idle**..."

- a. tall b. alone c. inactive d. straight

2. "I was in the last carriage, and, seeing some others **strolling** to and fro about the lines..."

- a. running b. jumping c. sliding d. walking

3. "I opened the door and stepped forth, as from a caravan by the **wayside**."

- a. edge b. north c. past d. village

4. "A green, open, **undulating** country stretched away upon all sides. "

- a. sprawling b. vast c. waving d. spinning

5. "...but the **contours** of the land were soft and English."

- a. birds b. spaces c. valleys d. outlines

6. "...the sun rises with a different **splendour** in America and Europe."

- a. speed b. beauty c. order d. direction

7. "It may be from habit, but to me the coming of day is less fresh and **inspiring** in the latter..."

- a. encouraging b. condescending c. confusing d. disparaging

8. "If it be an illusion it is one very deeply rooted, and in which my eyesight is **accomplice**."

- a. misleading b. imaginary c. a partner d. realistic

