"The Need of Being Versed in Country Things" tells of desolation, of a farmhouse which burned leaving only its barn, into and out of which the birds now fly through broken windows, "Their murmur more like the sigh we sigh / From too much dwelling on what has been." Yet, the poet corrects himself, the murmur is only like it, not the same as it. Birds do not grieve over what the human imagination finds desolate and sad; instead, nature seems to renew itself for them, lilacs, dry pump and fence post are still there, still carrying on in the way things do. In the final stanza Frost insists that

For them there was really nothing sad. But though they rejoiced in the nest they kept, One had to be versed in country things Not to believe the phoebes wept.

The diminished thing, so often celebrated in Mountain Interval, can be viewed here in the way the phoebes persist in their housekeeping, and to recognize this persistence for what it is one needs to be versed in country things. It is a nice stroke that Frost does not end the poem with the positive security, potentially complacent, of being so versed, as if the speaker were a wise know-it-all. Rather, the last line reaches out to what one would believe if one were deluded. That possibility is strongly there in the stanza's first line -- "For them there was really nothing sad" -- where the "really" acts as a check on the equally strong impulse (and a traditional poetic one all the way back through pastoral poetry) to believe that the birds are responsively grieving at the spectacle of human loss. Thus, in the last line, "Not to believe" doesn't cancel out the impulse to believe. After all, the poem's last word is "wept."
