

**NATURAL HISTORY OF
SELBORNE, AND
OBSERVATIONS ON
NATURE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649207565

Natural history of Selborne, and observations on nature by Gilbert White & John Burroughs & Clifton Johnson

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GILBERT WHITE & JOHN BURROUGHS & CLIFTON JOHNSON

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White's House "The Wakes," from the garden.

NATURAL HISTORY
OF
SELBORNE
AND
OBSERVATIONS ON NATURE

BY
GILBERT WHITE

WITH THE TEXT AND NEW LETTERS
OF THE BUCKLAND EDITION

INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN BURROUGHS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CLIFTON JOHNSON

TORONTO
MUSSON BOOK CO., LIMITED
1904

THIS EDITION IS LIMITED TO TWO HUNDRED SETS
NUMBERED AND SIGNED BY THE PUBLISHERS.

No.

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President



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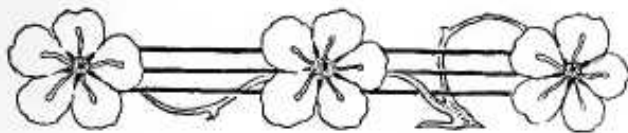
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INTRODUCTION.

ONE of the few books which I can return to and re-read every six or seven years is this book of Gilbert White's. It has a perennial charm. It is much like country things themselves. One does not read it with excitement or eager avidity; it is in a low key; it touches only upon minor matters; it is not eloquent, or witty, or profound; it has only now and then a twinkle of humour or a glint of fancy, and yet it has lived an hundred years and promises to live many hundreds of years more. So many learned and elaborate treatises have sunk beneath the waves upon which this cockle-shell of a book rides so safely and buoyantly! What is the secret of its longevity? One can do little more than name its qualities without tracing them to their sources. It is simple and wholesome, like bread, or meat, or milk. Perhaps it is just this same unstrained quality that keeps the book alive. Books that are piquant and exciting like condiments, or cloying like confectionery or pastry, it seems, have a much less

chance of survival. The secret of longevity of a man—what is it? Sanity, moderation, regularity, and that plus vitality, which is a gift. The book that lives has these things, and it has that same plus vitality, the secret of which cannot be explored. The sensational, intemperate books set the world on fire for a day, and then end in ashes and forgetfulness.

White's book diffuses a sort of rural England atmosphere through the mind. It is not the work of a city man who went down into the country to write it up, but of a born countryman—one who had in the very texture of his mind the flavour of rural things. Then it is the growth of a particular locality. Let a man stick his staff into the ground anywhere and say "This is home," and describe things from that point of view, or as they stand related to that spot—the weather, the fauna, the flora—and his account shall have an interest to us it could not have if not thus located and defined. This is one secret of White's charm. His work has a home air, a certain privacy and particularity. The great world is afar off; Selborne is as snug and secluded as a chimney corner; we get an authentic glimpse into the real life of one man there; we see him going about intent, lovingly intent, upon every phase of nature about him. We get glimpses into humble cottages and into the ways and doings of the people; we see the bacon drying in the chimneys; we see