

**IDLEHURST: A
JOURNAL KEPT IN
THE COUNTRY**

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Idlehurst: A Journal Kept in the Country by John Halsham

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BY

JOHN HALSHAM

"Haec tibi dictabam post factum petre Vacunae"

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15, WATERLOO PLACE

1898

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INTRODUCTORY.

MY DEAR PATERSON

That old question of ours, whether the world were larger to him who travelled far and wide, or to him who sat at home dreaming of the unknown lands, seems no nearer settlement after half a life of experiment than when it was first propounded in Blue Boar Lane sittings, or walks to Wheatley. Fixed here in the Sussex Weald, seldom moving out of the circle of the hills, often keeping within the village bounds for months together, I still maintain my unvisited world to be greater than all the seas and isles which you have profaned.

You will remember that when you had spent some ten years in Borneo, and it seemed probable that you

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would end your days there, you so far failed from your old vagrant principles (or was it that the old country had now become the stranger land?) as to look back to England, and to ask me for some account of our country life at home. You were pleased with the idea of a little chronicle of our Arnington days which I proposed to make you, as the readiest way I could find of presenting our country and people. Before my summer's journal is well ended, here you are in England again! But since you are tied in London, where a man is merged and lost, for sure, as wholly as he can be in Sarawak—in London that seems farther from Arnington quietude than your eastern isles—I think you may still entertain my compilation. It may serve in some measure to bring before you in Hampstead the life of the Weald—a life, I am afraid, that is undistinguished, commonplace enough; and yet the length between that and the pattern-moulded world you look down upon from the Heath! Being so little a traveller, I owe my knowledge of considerable portions of rural England to modern novels; and I learn from this source that Titanic passions, salient immorality, and an unintelligible dialect distinguish, singly or in combination, the peasantry of various parts of the British Isles with which I happen to be

unacquainted. In Sussex we do not possess these *differentia*. An odd transitional state between the old rural economy and a pervading plutocracy has apparently produced a rather respectable and soulless population, protected in its morals by a singular *vis inertia*, and speaking almost universally that dreadful New English which flows from Thames about the world.

Under the attrition of London on the one side and Brighton on the other, we are taking upon us a general polish, and losing all individual character. With hardly an exception, the old great families of the county are extinct and their houses have passed into the hands of the bankers, the stockbrokers, the distillers. The names which abide are the common people's—the Bottings and Tomsetts that fill our registers of 1557. There live in Arnington to-day three generations of Thomas Pockocks; and a Thomas Pockok appears in the roll of the Sussex archers who were at Agincourt. But beyond the names, little abides. Uniformity of school-methods is wearing down any small excrescences of individual character; the very forces of heredity seem powerless beneath the flattening weight of the Standards. Almost every recent legislative change has helped to obliterate the ancient distinctions; with a certain class of our village politicians the effacing of the old