



Sketches by a New Zealand Pilgrim.

“IN WHITE’S SELBORNE.”

By W. H. TRIGGS.

Photos. by the Author.

DEARLY as Gilbert White’s writings are loved by his English admirers at Home, there is no doubt they possess a peculiar savour for the English who have sought their fortunes beyond the seas.

For many of us the country sights and sounds, described so faithfully in those delightful pages, are among the most cherished of the pleasures of memory, never to be realised again in the flesh. We live again amid the dear old scenes. When we read those inimitable letters, the recollection of many a boyish ramble comes back to us, and our ears are filled with the sweet songs of English birds as in the days of long ago when we walked in country lanes, and maybe the young man’s fancy lightly turned to thoughts of love.

“The Natural History of Selborne” is, therefore, to be found in many an Australian and New Zealand up-country hut, as well as on the bookshelves of the town-dwelling colonist, and there are few books which are more lovingly prized. Need one say with what delight the present writer, who had long walked the lanes of Selborne in fancy when he was twelve thousand miles away from the actual spot, found himself one fine afternoon in 1894, driving over heath-covered hills, and along the “hollow laues” immortalised by White, bound for the veritable home of the naturalist? It was like going to the favourite haunts of a very dear friend.

Quite different were the sentiments aroused by a subsequent visit to Stratford-upon-Avon. Only once, when in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church, did I then lose the feeling of being in a public show-place—a place of patchings and restorations—a place where a painful effort was visible on every hand to recover the spirit and aroma of by-gone times that had for ever fled.

Not so at Selborne. The village is remote from the railway, sequestered, and— from the modern, pushing, utilitarian point of view—“unprogressive.” So much the better. It has altered but little in the last hundred years. White’s descriptions are almost as close as if they were written a year ago.

I knew every inch of the place long before I saw it. No need to ask a guide which was the famous yew, the Plestor, or the Hanger. They are to-day as they were when White described them, and his descriptions are photographic—nay, more, they are to the very life.

My companions of the drive were a Hampshire friend—a keen sportsman, born and bred in these parts—and his charming wife. On the way we passed the seat of Lord Selborne, and stopped to admire the beautiful church at Blackmoor, built by the ex Lord Chancellor, whose wife lies buried in the picturesque churchyard. An inscription inside the church records with becoming modesty and reserve the fact that it was