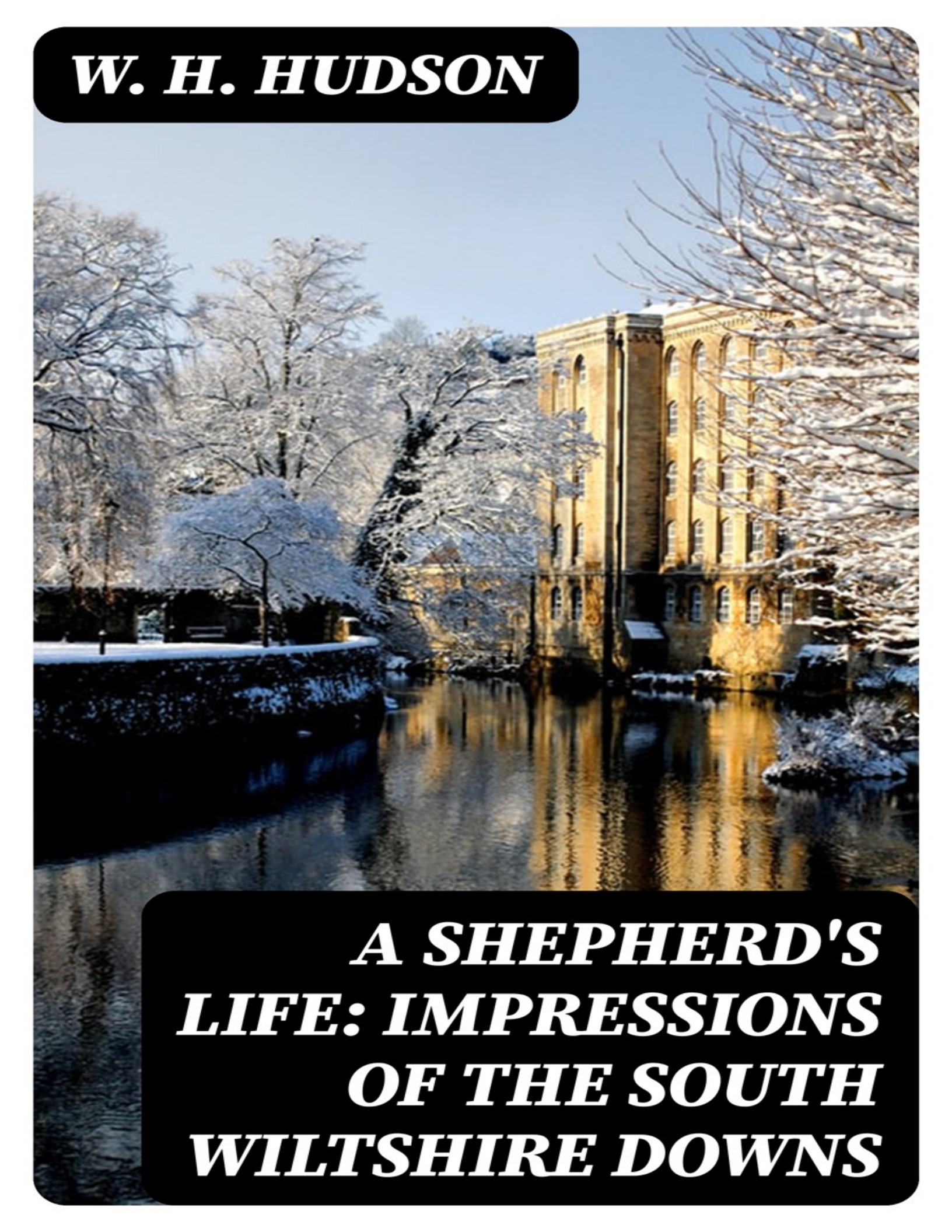


A photograph of a winter scene in a park. A large, multi-story stone building with many windows is reflected in a calm river. The trees are bare and covered in snow, and the ground is also covered in a layer of snow. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

W. H. HUDSON

***A SHEPHERD'S
LIFE: IMPRESSIONS
OF THE SOUTH
WILTSHIRE DOWNS***

W. H. Hudson

A Shepherd's Life: Impressions of the South Wiltshire Downs

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A SHEPHERD'S LIFE

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CHAPTER I

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SALISBURY PLAIN

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Introductory remarks—Wiltshire little favoured by tourists—Aspect of the downs—Bad weather—Desolate aspect—The bird-scarer—Fascination of the downs—The larger Salisbury Plain—Effect of the military occupation—A century's changes—Birds—Old Wiltshire sheep—Sheep-horns in a well—Changes wrought by cultivation—Rabbit-warrens on the downs—Barrows obliterated by the plough and by rabbits

Wiltshire looks large on the map of England, a great green county, yet it never appears to be a favourite one to those who go on rambles in the land. At all events I am unable to bring to mind an instance of a lover of Wiltshire who was not a native or a resident, or had not been to Marlborough and loved the country on account of early associations. Nor can I regard myself as an exception, since, owing to a certain kind of adaptiveness in me, a sense of being at home wherever grass grows, I am in a way a native too. Again, listen to any half-dozen of your friends discussing the places they have visited, or intend visiting, comparing notes about the counties, towns, churches, castles, scenery—all that draws them and satisfies their nature, and the chances are that they will not even mention Wiltshire. They all know it "in a way"; they have seen Salisbury Cathedral and Stonehenge, which everybody must

go to look at once in his life; and they have also viewed the country from the windows of a railroad carriage as they passed through on their flight to Bath and to Wales with its mountains, and to the west country, which many of us love best of all—Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall. For there is nothing striking in Wiltshire, at all events to those who love nature first; nor mountains, nor sea, nor anything to compare with the places they are hastening to, west or north. The downs! Yes, the downs are there, full in sight of your window, in their flowing forms resembling vast, pale green waves, wave beyond wave, "in fluctuation fixed"; a fine country to walk on in fine weather for all those who regard the mere exercise of walking as sufficient pleasure. But to those who wish for something more, these downs may be neglected, since, if downs are wanted, there is the higher, nobler Sussex range within an hour of London. There are others on whom the naked aspect of the downs has a repelling effect. Like Gilpin they love not an undecorated earth; and false and ridiculous as Gilpin's taste may seem to me and to all those who love the chalk, which "spoils everything" as Gilpin said, he certainly expresses a feeling common to those who are unaccustomed to the emptiness and silence of these great spaces.

As to walking on the downs, one remembers that the fine days are not so many, even in the season when they are looked for—they have certainly been few during this wet and uncomfortable one of 1909. It is indeed only on the chalk hills that I ever feel disposed to quarrel with this English climate, for all weathers are good to those who love the open air, and have their special attractions. What a

pleasure it is to be out in rough weather in October when the equinoctial gales are on, "the wind Euroclydon," to listen to its roaring in the bending trees, to watch the dead leaves flying, the pestilence-stricken multitudes, yellow and black and red, whirled away in flight on flight before the volleying blast, and to hear and see and feel the tempests of rain, the big silver-grey drops that smite you like hail! And what pleasure too, in the still grey November weather, the time of suspense and melancholy before winter, a strange quietude, like a sense of apprehension in nature! And so on through the revolving year, in all places in all weathers, there is pleasure in the open air, except on these chalk hills because of their bleak nakedness. There the wind and driving rain are not for but against you, and may overcome you with misery. One feels their loneliness, monotony, and desolation on many days, sometimes even when it is not wet, and I here recall an amusing encounter with a bird-scarer during one of these dreary spells.

It was in March, bitterly cold, with an east wind which had been blowing many days, and overhead the sky was of a hard, steely grey. I was cycling along the valley of the Ebbles, and finally leaving it pushed up a long steep slope and set off over the high plain by a dusty road with the wind hard against me. A more desolate scene than the one before me it would be hard to imagine, for the land was all ploughed and stretched away before me, an endless succession of vast grey fields, divided by wire fences. On all that space there was but one living thing in sight, a human form, a boy, far away on the left side, standing in the middle of a big field with something which looked like a gun in his

hand. Immediately after I saw him he, too, appeared to have caught sight of me, for turning he set off running as fast as he could over the ploughed ground towards the road, as if intending to speak to me. The distance he would have to run was about a quarter of a mile and I doubted that he would be there in time to catch me, but he ran fast and the wind was against me, and he arrived at the road just as I got to that point. There by the side of the fence he stood, panting from his race, his handsome face glowing with colour, a boy about twelve or thirteen, with a fine strong figure, remarkably well dressed for a bird-scarer. For that was what he was, and he carried a queer, heavy-looking old gun. I got off my wheel and waited for him to speak, but he was silent, and continued regarding me with the smiling countenance of one well pleased with himself. "Well?" I said, but there was no answer; he only kept on smiling.

"What did you want?" I demanded impatiently.

"I didn't want anything."

"But you started running here as fast as you could the moment you caught sight of me."

"Yes, I did."

"Well, what did you do it for—what was your object in running here?"

"Just to see you pass," he answered.

It was a little ridiculous and vexed me at first, but by and by when I left him, after some more conversation, I felt rather pleased; for it was a new and somewhat flattering experience to have any person run a long distance over a ploughed field, burdened with a heavy gun, "just to see me pass."

But it was not strange in the circumstances; his hours in that grey, windy desolation must have seemed like days, and it was a break in the monotony, a little joyful excitement in getting to the road in time to see a passer-by more closely, and for a few moments gave him a sense of human companionship. I began even to feel a little sorry for him, alone there in his high, dreary world, but presently thought he was better off and better employed than most of his fellows poring over miserable books in school, and I wished we had a more rational system of education for the agricultural districts, one which would not keep the children shut up in a room during all the best hours of the day, when to be out of doors, seeing, hearing, and doing, would fit them so much better for the life-work before them. Squeers' method was a wiser one. We think less of it than of the delightful caricature, which makes Squeers "a joy for ever," as Mr. Lang has said of Pecksniff. But Dickens was a Londoner, and incapable of looking at this or any other question from any other than the Londoner's standpoint. Can you have a better system for the children of all England than this one which will turn out the most perfect draper's assistant in Oxford Street, or, to go higher, the most efficient Mr. Guppy in a solicitor's office? It is true that we have Nature's unconscious intelligence against us; that by and by, when at the age of fourteen the boy is finally released, he will set to work to undo the wrong by discharging from his mind its accumulations of useless knowledge as soon as he begins the work of life. But what a waste of time and energy and money! One can only hope that the slow intellect of the country will wake to this

question some day, that the countryman will say to the townsman, Go on making your laws and systems of education for your own children, who will live as you do indoors; while I shall devise a different one for mine, one which will give them hard muscles and teach them to raise the mutton and pork and cultivate the potatoes and cabbages on which we all feed.

To return to the downs. Their very emptiness and desolation, which frightens the stranger from them, only serves to make them more fascinating to those who are intimate with and have learned to love them. That dreary aspect brings to mind the other one, when, on waking with the early sunlight in the room, you look out on a blue sky, cloudless or with white clouds. It may be fancy, or the effect of contrast, but it has always seemed to me that just as the air is purer and fresher on these chalk heights than on the earth below, and as the water is of a more crystal purity, and the sky perhaps bluer, so do all colours and all sounds have a purity and vividness and intensity beyond that of other places. I see it in the yellows of hawkweed, rock-rose, and birds'-foot-trefoil, in the innumerable specks of brilliant colour—blue and white and rose—of milk-wort and squinancy-wort, and in the large flowers of the dwarf thistle, glowing purple in its green setting; and I hear it in every bird-sound, in the trivial songs of yellow-hammer and corn-bunting, and of dunnock and wren and whitethroat.

The pleasure of walking on the downs is not, however, a subject which concerns me now; it is one I have written about in a former work, "Nature in Downland," descriptive of the South Downs. The theme of the present work is the life,

human and other, of the South Wiltshire Downs, or of Salisbury Plain. It is the part of Wiltshire which has most attracted me. Most persons would say that the Marlborough Downs are greater, more like the great Sussex range as it appears from the Weald: but chance brought me farther south, and the character and life of the village people when I came to know them made this appear the best place to be in.

The Plain itself is not a precisely denned area, and may be made to include as much or little as will suit the writer's purpose. If you want a continuous plain, with no dividing valley cutting through it, you must place it between the Avon and Wylde Rivers, a distance about fifteen miles broad and as many long, with the village of Tilshead in its centre; or, if you don't mind the valleys, you can say it extends from Downton and Tollard Royal south of Salisbury to the Pewsey vale in the north, and from the Hampshire border on the east side to Dorset and Somerset on the west, about twenty-five to thirty miles each way. My own range is over this larger Salisbury Plain, which includes the River Ebble, or Ebe, with its numerous interesting villages, from Odstock and Combe Bisset, near Salisbury and "the Chalks," to pretty Alvediston near the Dorset line, and all those in the Nadder valley, and westward to White Sheet Hill above Mere. You can picture this high chalk country as an open hand, the left hand, with Salisbury in the hollow of the palm, placed nearest the wrist, and the five valleys which cut through it as the five spread fingers, from the Bourne (the little finger) succeeded by Avon, Wylde, and Nadder, to the

Ebble, which comes in lower down as the thumb and has its junction with the main stream below Salisbury.

A very large portion of this high country is now in a transitional state, that was once a sheep-walk and is now a training ground for the army. Where the sheep are taken away the turf loses the smooth, elastic character which makes it better to walk on than the most perfect lawn. The sheep fed closely, and everything that grew on the down—grasses, clovers, and numerous small creeping herbs—had acquired the habit of growing and flowering close to the ground, every species and each individual plant striving, with the unconscious intelligence that is in all growing things, to hide its leaves and pushing sprays under the others, to escape the nibbling teeth by keeping closer to the surface. There are grasses and some herbs, the plantain among them, which keep down very close but must throw up a tall stem to flower and seed. Look at the plantain when its flowering time comes; each particular plant growing with its leaves so close down on the surface as to be safe from the busy, searching mouths, then all at once throwing up tall, straight stems to flower and ripen its seeds quickly. Watch a flock at this time, and you will see a sheep walking about, rapidly plucking the flowering spikes, cutting them from the stalk with a sharp snap, taking them off at the rate of a dozen or so in twenty seconds. But the sheep cannot be all over the downs at the same time, and the time is short, myriads of plants throwing up their stems at once, so that many escape, and it has besides a deep perennial root so that the plant keeps its own life though it may be unable to sow any seeds for many seasons. So with other species

which must send up a tall flower stem; and by and by, the flowering over and the seeds ripened or lost, the dead, scattered stems remain like long hairs growing out of a close fur. The turf remains unchanged; but take the sheep away and it is like the removal of a pressure, or a danger: the plant recovers liberty and confidence and casts off the old habit; it springs and presses up to get the better of its fellows—to get all the dew and rain and sunshine that it can—and the result is a rough surface.

Another effect of the military occupation is the destruction of the wild life of the Plain, but that is a matter I have written about in my last book, "Afoot in England," in a chapter on Stonehenge, and need not dwell on here. To the lover of Salisbury Plain as it was, the sight of military camps, with white tents or zinc houses, and of bodies of men in khaki marching and drilling, and the sound of guns, now informs him that he is in a district which has lost its attraction, where nature has been dispossessed.

Meanwhile, there is a corresponding change going on in the human life of the district. Let anyone describe it as he thinks best, as an improvement or a deterioration, it is a great change nevertheless, which in my case and probably that of many others is as disagreeable to contemplate as that which we are beginning to see in the down, which was once a sheep-walk and is so no longer. On this account I have ceased to frequent that portion of the Plain where the War Office is in possession of the land, and to keep to the southern side in my rambles, out of sight and hearing of the "white-tented camps" and mimic warfare. Here is Salisbury Plain as it has been these thousand years past, or ever since

sheep were pastured here more than in any other district in England, and that may well date even more than ten centuries back.

Undoubtedly changes have taken place even here, some very great, chiefly during the last, or from the late eighteenth century. Changes both in the land and the animal life, wild and domestic. Of the losses in wild bird life there will be something to say in another chapter; they relate chiefly to the extermination of the finest species, the big bird, especially the soaring bird, which is now gone out of all this wide Wiltshire sky. As a naturalist I must also lament the loss of the old Wiltshire breed of sheep, although so long gone. Once it was the only breed known in Wilts, and extended over the entire county; it was a big animal, the largest of the fine-woolled sheep in England, but for looks it certainly compared badly with modern downland breeds and possessed, it was said, all the points which the breeder, or improver, was against. Thus, its head was big and clumsy, with a round nose, its legs were long and thick, its belly without wool, and both sexes were horned. Horns, even in a ram, are an abomination to the modern sheep-farmer in Southern England. Finally, it was hard to fatten. On the other hand it was a sheep which had been from of old on the bare open downs and was modified to suit the conditions, the scanty feed, the bleak, bare country, and the long distances it had to travel to and from the pasture ground. It was a strong, healthy, intelligent animal, in appearance and character like the old original breed of sheep on the pampas of South America, which I knew as a boy, a coarse-woolled sheep with naked belly, tall and

hardy, a greatly modified variety of the sheep introduced by the Spanish colonist three centuries ago. At all events the old Wiltshire sheep had its merits, and when the Southdown breed was introduced during the late eighteenth century the farmer viewed it with disfavour; they liked their old native animal, and did not want to lose it. But it had to go in time, just as in later times the Southdown had to go when the Hampshire Down took its place—the breed which is now universal, in South Wilts at all events.

A solitary flock of the pure-bred old Wiltshire sheep existed in the county as late as 1840, but the breed has now so entirely disappeared from the country that you find many shepherds who have never even heard of it. Not many days ago I met with a curious instance of this ignorance of the past. I was talking to a shepherd, a fine intelligent fellow, keenly interested in the subjects of sheep and sheep-dogs, on the high down above the village of Broad Chalk on the Ebble, and he told me that his dog was of mixed breed, but on its mother's side came from a Welsh sheep-dog, that his father had always had the Welsh dog, once common in Wiltshire, and he wondered why it had gone out as it was so good an animal. This led me to say something about the old sheep having gone out too, and as he had never heard of the old breed I described the animal to him.

What I told him, he said, explained something which had been a puzzle to him for some years. There was a deep hollow in the down near the spot where we were standing, and at the bottom he said there was an old well which had been used in former times to water the sheep, but masses of earth had fallen down from the sides, and in that

condition it had remained for no one knew how long—perhaps fifty, perhaps a hundred years. Some years ago it came into his master's head to have this old well cleaned out, and this was done with a good deal of labour, the sides having first been boarded over to make it safe for the workmen below. At the bottom of the well a vast store of rams' horns was discovered and brought out; and it was a mystery to the fanner and the men how so large a number of sheep's horns had been got together; for rams are few and do not die often, and here there were hundreds of horns. He understood it now, for if all the sheep, ewes as well as rams, were horned in the old breed, a collection like this might easily have been made.

The greatest change of the last hundred years is no doubt that which the plough has wrought in the aspect of the downs. There is a certain pleasure to the eye in the wide fields of golden corn, especially of wheat, in July and August; but a ploughed down is a down made ugly, and it strikes one as a mistake, even from a purely economic point of view, that this old rich turf, the slow product of centuries, should be ruined for ever as sheep-pasture when so great an extent of uncultivated land exists elsewhere, especially the heavy clays of the Midlands, better suited for corn. The effect of breaking up the turf on the high downs is often disastrous; the thin soil which was preserved by the close, hard turf is blown or washed away, and the soil becomes poorer year by year, in spite of dressing, until it is hardly worth cultivating. Clover may be grown on it but it continues to deteriorate; or the tenant or landlord may turn it into a rabbit-warren, the most fatal policy of all. How hideous they

are—those great stretches of downland, enclosed in big wire fences and rabbit netting, with little but wiry weeds, moss, and lichen growing on them, the earth dug up everywhere by the disorderly little beasts! For a while there is a profit—"it will serve me my time," the owner says—but the end is utter barrenness.

One must lament, too, the destruction of the ancient earth-works, especially of the barrows, which is going on all over the downs, most rapidly where the land is broken up by the plough. One wonders if the ever-increasing curiosity of our day with regard to the history of the human race in the land continues to grow, what our descendants of the next half of the century, to go no farther, will say of us and our incredible carelessness in the matter! So small a matter to us, but one which will, perhaps, be immensely important to them! It is, perhaps, better for our peace that we do not know; it would not be pleasant to have our children's and children's children's contemptuous expressions sounding in our prophetic ears. Perhaps we have no right to complain of the obliteration of these memorials of antiquity by the plough; the living are more than the dead, and in this case it may be said that we are only following the Artemisian example in consuming (in our daily bread) minute portions of the ashes of our old relations, albeit untearfully, with a cheerful countenance. Still one cannot but experience a shock on seeing the plough driven through an ancient, smooth turf, curiously marked with barrows, lynchetts, and other mysterious mounds and depressions, where sheep have been pastured for a thousand years, without obscuring

these chance hieroglyphs scored by men on the surface of the hills.

It is not, however, only on the cultivated ground that the destruction is going on; the rabbit, too, is an active agent in demolishing the barrows and other earth-works. He burrows into the mound and throws out bushels of chalk and clay, which is soon washed down by the rains; he tunnels it through and through and sometimes makes it his village; then one day the farmer or keeper, who is not an archaeologist, comes along and puts his ferrets into the holes, and one of them, after drinking his fill of blood, falls asleep by the side of his victim, and the keeper sets to work with pick and shovel to dig him out, and demolishes half the barrow to recover his vile little beast.

CHAPTER II

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SALISBURY AS I SEE IT

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The Salisbury of the villager—The cathedral from the meadows—Walks to Wilton and Old Sarum—The spire and a rainbow—Charm of Old Sarum—The devastation—Salisbury from Old Sarum—Leland's description—Salisbury and the village mind—Market-day—The infirmary—The cathedral—The lesson of a child's desire—In the streets again—An Apollo of the downs

To the dwellers on the Plain, Salisbury itself is an exceedingly important place—the most important in the world. For if they have seen a greater—London, let us say—it has left but a confused, a phantasmagoric image on the mind, an impression of endless thoroughfares and of innumerable people all apparently in a desperate hurry to do something, yet doing nothing; a labyrinth of streets and wilderness of houses, swarming with beings who have no definite object and no more to do with realities than so many lunatics, and are unconfined because they are so numerous that all the asylums in the world could not contain them. But of Salisbury they have a very clear image: inexpressibly rich as it is in sights, in wonders, full of people—hundreds of people in the streets and market-place—they can take it all in and know its meaning. Every man and woman, of all classes, in all that concourse, is there for some definite purpose which they can guess and

understand; and the busy street and market, and red houses and soaring spire, are all one, and part and parcel too of their own lives in their own distant little village by the Avon or Wylfe, or anywhere on the Plain. And that soaring spire which, rising so high above the red town, first catches the eye, the one object which gives unity and distinction to the whole picture, is not more distinct in the mind than the entire Salisbury with its manifold interests and activities.

There is nothing in the architecture of England more beautiful than that same spire. I have seen it many times, far and near, from all points of view, and am never in or near the place but I go to some spot where I look at and enjoy the sight; but I will speak here of the two best points of view.

The nearest, which is the artist's favourite point, is from the meadows; there, from the waterside, you have the cathedral not too far away nor too near for a picture, whether on canvas or in the mind, standing amidst its great old trees, with nothing but the moist green meadows and the river between. One evening, during the late summer of this wettest season, when the rain was beginning to cease, I went out this way for my stroll, the pleasantest if not the only "walk" there is in Salisbury. It is true, there are two others: one to Wilton by its long, shady avenue; the other to Old Sarum; but these are now motor-roads, and until the loathed hooting and dusting engines are thrust away into roads of their own there is little pleasure in them for the man on foot. The rain ceased, but the sky was still stormy, with a great blackness beyond the cathedral and still other black clouds coming up from the west behind me. Then the

sun, near its setting, broke out, sending a flame of orange colour through the dark masses around it, and at the same time flinging a magnificent rainbow on that black cloud against which the immense spire stood wet with rain and flushed with light, so that it looked like a spire built of a stone impregnated with silver. Never had Nature so glorified man's work! It was indeed a marvellous thing to see, an effect so rare that in all the years I had known Salisbury, and the many times I had taken that stroll in all weathers, it was my first experience of such a thing. How lucky, then, was Constable to have seen it, when he set himself to paint his famous picture! And how brave he was and even wise to have attempted such a subject, one which, I am informed by artists with the brush, only a madman would undertake, however great a genius he might be. It was impossible, we know, even to a Constable, but we admire his failure nevertheless, even as we admire Turner's many failures; but when we go back to Nature we are only too glad to forget all about the picture.

The view from the meadows will not, in the future, I fear, seem so interesting to me; I shall miss the rainbow, and shall never see again except in that treasured image the great spire as Constable saw and tried to paint it. In like manner, though for a different reason, my future visits to Old Sarum will no longer give me the same pleasure experienced on former occasions.

Old Sarum stands over the Avon, a mile and a half from Salisbury; a round chalk hill about 300 feet high, in its round shape and isolation resembling a stupendous tumulus in which the giants of antiquity were buried, its steeply

sloping, green sides ringed about with vast, concentric earth-works and ditches, the work of the "old people," as they say on the Plain, when referring to the ancient Britons, but how ancient, whether invading Celts or Aborigines—the true Britons, who possessed the land from neolithic times—even the anthropologists, the wise men of to-day, are unable to tell us. Later, it was a Roman station, one of the most important, and in after ages a great Norman castle and cathedral city, until early in the thirteenth century, when the old church was pulled down and a new and better one to last for ever was built in the green plain by many running waters. Church and people gone, the castle fell into ruin, though some believe it existed down to the fifteenth century; but from that time onwards the site has been a place of historical memories and a wilderness. Nature had made it a sweet and beautiful spot; the earth over the old buried ruins was covered with an elastic turf, jewelled with the bright little flowers of the chalk, the ramparts and ditches being all overgrown with a dense thicket of thorn, holly, elder, bramble, and ash, tangled up with ivy, briony, and traveller's-joy. Once only during the last five or six centuries some slight excavations were made when, in 1834, as the result of an excessively dry summer, the lines of the cathedral foundations were discernible on the surface. But it will no longer be the place it was, the Society of Antiquaries having received permission from the Dean and Chapter of Salisbury to work their sweet will on the site. That ancient, beautiful carcass, which had long made their mouths water, on which they have now fallen like a pack of hungry hyenas to tear off the old hide of green turf and

burrow down to open to the light or drag out the deep, stony framework. The beautiful surrounding thickets, too, must go, they tell me, since you cannot turn the hill inside out without destroying the trees and bushes that crown it. What person who has known it and has often sought that spot for the sake of its ancient associations, and of the sweet solace they have found in the solitude, or for the noble view of the sacred city from its summit, will not deplore this fatal amiability of the authorities, this weak desire to please every one and inability to say no to such a proposal!

But let me now return to the object which brings me to this spot; it was not to lament the loss of the beautiful, which cannot be preserved in our age—even this best one of all which Salisbury possessed cannot be preserved—but to look at Salisbury from this point of view. It is not as from "the meadows" a view of the cathedral only, but of the whole town, amidst its circle of vast green downs. It has a beautiful aspect from that point: a red-brick and red-tiled town, set low on that circumscribed space, whose soft, brilliant green is in lovely contrast with the paler hue of the downs beyond, the perennial moist green of its water-meadows. For many swift, clear currents flow around and through Salisbury, and doubtless in former days there were many more channels in the town itself. Leland's description is worth quoting: "There be many fair streates in the Cite Saresbyri, and especially the High Streate and Castle Strete.... Al the Streates in a maner, in New Saresbyri, hath little streamlettes and arms derivyd out of Avon that runneth through them. The site of the very town of Saresbyri and much ground thereabout is playne and low,

and as a pan or receyvov of most part of the waters of Wiltshire."

On this scene, this red town with the great spire, set down among water-meadows, encircled by paler green chalk hills, I look from the top of the inner and highest rampart or earth-work; or going a little distance down sit at ease on the turf to gaze at it by the hour. Nor could a sweeter resting-place be found, especially at the time of ripe elder-berries, when the thickets are purple with their clusters and the starlings come in flocks to feed on them, and feeding keep up a perpetual, low musical jangle about me.

It is not, however, of "New Saresbyri" as seen by the tourist, with a mind full of history, archaeology, and the aesthetic delight in cathedrals, that I desire to write, but of Salisbury as it appears to the dweller on the Plain. For Salisbury is the capital of the Plain, the head and heart of all those villages, too many to count, scattered far and wide over the surrounding country. It is the villager's own peculiar city, and even as the spot it stands upon is the "pan or receyvov of most part of the waters of Wiltshire," so is it the receyvov of all he accomplishes in his laborious life, and thitherward flow all his thoughts and ambitions. Perhaps it is not so difficult for me as it would be for most persons who are not natives to identify myself with him and see it as he sees it. That greater place we have been in, that mighty, monstrous London, is ever present to the mind and is like a mist before the sight when we look at other places; but for me there is no such mist, no image so immense and persistent as to cover and obscure all others, and no such mental habit as that of regarding people as a mere crowd, a

mass, a monstrous organism, in and on which each individual is but a cell, a scale. This feeling troubles and confuses my mind when I am in London, where we live "too thick"; but quitting it I am absolutely free; it has not entered my soul and coloured me with its colour or shut me out from those who have never known it, even of the simplest dwellers on the soil who, to our sophisticated minds, may seem like beings of another species. This is my happiness—to feel, in all places, that I am one with them. To say, for instance, that I am going to Salisbury to-morrow, and catch the gleam in the children's eye and watch them, furtively watching me, whisper to one another that there will be something for them, too, on the morrow. To set out betimes and overtake the early carriers' carts on the road, each with its little cargo of packages and women with baskets and an old man or two, to recognize acquaintances among those who sit in front, and as I go on overtaking and passing carriers and the half-gipsy, little "general dealer" in his dirty, ramshackle, little cart drawn by a rough, fast-trotting pony, all of us intent on business and pleasure, bound for Salisbury—the great market and emporium and place of all delights for all the great Plain. I remember that on my very last expedition, when I had come twelve miles in the rain and was standing at a street corner, wet to the skin, waiting for my carrier, a man in a hurry said to me, "I say, just keep an eye on my cart for a minute or two while I run round to see somebody. I've got some fowls in it, and if you see anyone come poking round just ask them what they want—you can't trust every one. I'll be back in a minute." And he

was gone, and I was very pleased to watch his cart and fowls till he came back.

Business is business and must be attended to, in fair or foul weather, but for business with pleasure we prefer it fine on market-day. The one great and chief pleasure, in which all participate, is just to be there, to be in the crowd—a joyful occasion which gives a festive look to every face. The mere sight of it exhilarates like wine. The numbers—the people and the animals! The carriers' carts drawn up in rows on rows—carriers from a hundred little villages on the Bourne, the Avon, the Wylye, the Nadder, the Ebble, and from all over the Plain, each bringing its little contingent. Hundreds and hundreds more coming by train; you see them pouring down Fisherton Street in a continuous procession, all hurrying market-wards. And what a lively scene the market presents now, full of cattle and sheep and pigs and crowds of people standing round the shouting auctioneers! And horses, too, the beribboned hacks, and ponderous draught horses with manes and tails decorated with golden straw, thundering over the stone pavement as they are trotted up and down! And what a profusion of fruit and vegetables, fish and meat, and all kinds of provisions on the stalls, where women with baskets on their arms are jostling and bargaining! The Corn Exchange is like a huge beehive, humming with the noise of talk, full of brown-faced farmers in their riding and driving clothes and leggings, standing in knots or thrusting their hands into sacks of oats and barley. You would think that all the farmers from all the Plain were congregated there. There is a joyful contagion in it all. Even the depressed young lover, the forlornest of

beings, repairs his wasted spirits and takes heart again. Why, if I've seen a girl with a pretty face to-day I've seen a hundred—and more. And she thinks they be so few she can treat me like that and barely give me a pleasant word in a month! Let her come to Salisbury and see how many there be!

And so with every one in that vast assemblage—vast to the dweller in the Plain. Each one is present as it were in two places, since each has in his or her heart the constant image of home—the little, peaceful village in the remote valley; of father and mother and neighbours and children, in school just now, or at play, or home to dinner—home cares and concerns and the business in Salisbury. The selling and buying; friends and relations to visit or to meet in the market-place, and—how often!—the sick one to be seen at the Infirmary. This home of the injured and ailing, which is in the mind of so many of the people gathered together, is indeed the cord that draws and binds the city and the village closest together and makes the two like one.

That great, comely building of warm, red brick in Fisherton Street, set well back so that you can see it as a whole, behind its cedar and beech-trees—how familiar it is to the villagers! In numberless humble homes, in hundreds of villages of the Plain, and all over the surrounding country, the "Infirmary" is a name of the deepest meaning, and a place of many glad and tender and beautiful associations. I heard it spoken of in a manner which surprised me at first, for I know some of the London poor and am accustomed to their attitude towards the metropolitan hospitals. The Londoner uses them very freely; they have come to be as

necessary to him as the grocer's shop and the public-house, but for all the benefits he receives from them he has no faintest sense of gratitude, and it is my experience that if you speak to him of this he is roused to anger and demands, "What are they for?" So far is he from having any thankful thoughts for all that has been given him for nothing and done for him and for his, if he has anything to say at all on the matter it is to find fault with the hospitals and cast blame on them for not having healed him more quickly or thoroughly.

This country town hospital and infirmary is differently regarded by the villagers of the Plain. It is curious to find how many among them are personally acquainted with it; perhaps it is not easy for anyone, even in this most healthy district, to get through life without sickness, and all are liable to accidents. The injured or afflicted youth, taken straight from his rough, hard life and poor cottage, wonders at the place he finds himself in—the wide, clean, airy room and white, easy bed, the care and skill of the doctors, the tender nursing by women, and comforts and luxuries, all without payment, but given as it seems to him out of pure divine love and compassion—all this comes to him as something strange, almost incredible. He suffers much perhaps, but can bear pain stoically and forget it when it is past, but the loving kindness he has experienced is remembered.

That is one of the very great things Salisbury has for the villagers, and there are many more which may not be spoken of, since we do not want to lose sight of the wood on account of the trees; only one must be mentioned for a

special reason, and that is the cathedral. The villager is extremely familiar with it as he sees it from the market and the street and from a distance, from all the roads which lead him to Salisbury. Seeing it he sees everything beneath it—all the familiar places and objects, all the streets—High and Castle and Crane Streets, and many others, including Endless Street, which reminds one of Sydney Smith's last flicker of fun before that candle went out; and the "White Hart" and the "Angel" and "Old George," and the humbler "Goat" and "Green Man" and "Shoulder of Mutton," with many besides; and the great, red building with its cedar-tree, and the knot of men and boys standing on the bridge gazing down on the trout in the swift river below; and the market-place and its busy crowds—all the familiar sights and scenes that come under the spire like a flock of sheep on a burning day in summer, grouped about a great tree growing in the pasture-land. But he is not familiar with the interior of the great fane; it fails to draw him, doubtless because he has no time in his busy, practical life for the cultivation of the aesthetic faculties. There is a crust over that part of his mind; but it need not always and ever be so; the crust is not on the mind of the child.

Before a stall in the market-place a child is standing with her mother—a commonplace-looking, little girl of about twelve, blue-eyed, light-haired, with thin arms and legs, dressed, poorly enough, for her holiday. The mother, stoutish, in her best but much-worn black gown and a brown straw, out-of-shape hat, decorated with bits of ribbon and a few soiled and frayed artificial flowers. Probably she is the wife of a labourer who works hard to keep himself and