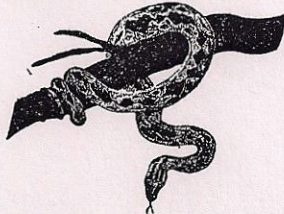


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The illustrations on this page are reproduced from Fitch Daglish's woodcuts for W. H. Hudson's "Far Away and Long Ago" (Dent, 10s. 6d.)

IT is ten years since Hudson died, and in less than ten years, incredible though it may seem, we shall be celebrating the centenary of his birth. Hudson, a cool and severe critic of his own work, would doubtless have deprecated even a little of that ostentatious celebration with which we mark the anniversaries of the great; he was a simple and retiring man, and like that other great lover of nature, Edward Thomas, loathed



the shams and falsities of the cheaply clever and the hypocrisy and affectation of the little critics as much as he hated the bird-catcher, the snake-killer, and the vandalist.

He would have asked for no other, and no finer memorial than that we should simply read his works, and that perhaps we should, as we heard a lark or a chaffinch singing its song, think at once of him.

Let us hope there will be no celebrations for Hudson. "One can't tell how this fellow gets his effects," wrote Conrad; "he writes as the grass grows." To that fine tribute Conrad might have added—"as the grass grows in England," for like the grass in the English meadow Hudson's work is continually green and sweet, a delight to the mind, the heart and the eye. There is no other herb like the grass, at once so common and heavenly, so simple and glorious; and there is no other writer like Hudson, getting his effect as the grass grows and giving his work the simplicity and glory and everlasting greenness of it.

It is astonishing that in England, where the love of the countryside and of flowers is said to take the place of art, there have been few great nature writers, and that the three greatest of them, Hudson, Jefferies and Edward Thomas, should have belonged to one century. It is astonishing also to remember that Hudson was a Victorian, almost identically contemporary with Thomas Hardy, for there is nothing Victorian, or of any one age, about his work.

Like the grass again, Hudson does not date. His work is as fresh and modern as though written yesterday. "Yet one meets with cultivated English people, lovers of wild nature," wrote Edward Garnett, "who, though they may have heard of Hudson, have never read any of his books . . . and are surprised to learn that he wrote over twenty volumes."

In compiling "A Hudson Anthology," Garnett confessed himself so baffled by the many passages of original insight and creative beauty that after I had completed my task it seemed to me that it would be easy to compile a

A Traveller in Little Things

By H. E. BATES

second and even third companion volume almost equal in point of creative force and literary charm." And so the reader who goes to Hudson will not find merely freshness and delight, but depth and variation and quantity.

And here one may point out that there are two Hudsons: the writer of romances, "A Crystal Age," "El Ombu," "Green Mansions," and that delicious work, "The Purple Land"; and

BOOKS BY W. H. HUDSON

A FOOT IN ENGLAND. (Wayfarers Library. 1/6.)

A TRAVELLER IN LITTLE THINGS. (New Adelphi Library. 3/6.)

A HUDSON ANTHOLOGY. By Edward Garnett. (Dent. 6/-)

THE NEW POPULAR EDITION. Fourteen Volumes. (Dent. 6/- each.)

NATURE IN DOWNLAND AND AN OLD THORN. (Open Air Library. 3/6.)

the naturalist and lover of wild life who recorded his experiences and reflections and observations and deep knowledge so vividly in books such as "The Diary of a Naturalist," "Hampshire Days," "Nature in Downland," "Adventures Among Birds," "The Land's End."

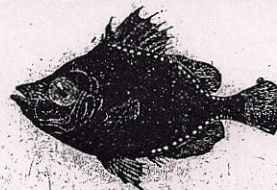
One work stands apart as possessing not only all the qualities of both his fiction and his essays, but some other quality, difficult to define, that puts it above them all. One cannot tell how it was that a man of seventy-six could write with the purity of tone, the richness of colour, the strength and vitality with which Hudson wrote "Far Away and Long Ago."

In this autobiography of his boyhood in South America, a richer, deeper, purer book in style and content than anything he ever wrote, one has the whole of Hudson, the master of glorious poetic prose, the weaver of that tenuous, strong, subtle web of knowledge, anecdote, colour, sensibility and beauty, the acute and sympathetic observer of men, and still more of women and children.

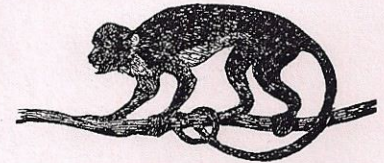
"I would that every man, woman, and child in England," wrote John Galsworthy, "were made to read him." And there is nothing better for them to begin upon than "Far Away and Long Ago." Here Hudson's beginnings, his whole purpose in life, the very heart of the man are to be found. In this book is that unforgettable description of the peach-trees in blossom:—

"In August the peach blossomed. The great old trees standing wide apart on their grassy carpet, barely touching each other with the tips of their widest branches, were like great mound-shaped clouds of exquisite rose-fruit blossoms. There was then nothing in the universe which could compare in loveliness to that spectacle."

And so it goes on, with Hudson describing the flock of green parquets coming down to settle among the blossoms, and all his own joy in the spectacle and his anger at the birds tearing off the blossoms—"a crime even in a bird." It is an



exquisite passage. Compare it with the prose of Hudson's contemporaries, with, for instance, Hardy; contrast its perfect simplicity, its fresh, exquisite sensibility, its colour and light, with the prose of Hardy, heavy, ponderous, latinised, over-elaborate, over-loaded; the one is like the flight of a bird, the other is like some old, laborious, creaking wagon. The wagon is already dating, going out of date; the bird is as fresh and perfect in its flight as ever.



It is impossible to imagine an age to which Hudson will seem stale and dead. His fecundity is like that of nature itself; his genius wells up from some inexhaustible spring. He wrote of himself, in "Hampshire Days":—

"The blue sky, the brown soil beneath, the grass, the trees, the animals, the wind, the rain and the stars are never strange to me; for I am in, and of, and am *one*, with them; and my flesh and the soil are one, and the heat of my blood, and in the sunshine *are* one, and the winds and the tempests and my passions are one."

There is the secret of Hudson's genius, better than any other man ever put it or ever will. He was fond of calling himself "the traveller in little things"; it was the very nature of his travelling in those little things, birds, animals, snakes, flowers, butterflies, children and stars, that made him great.

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