

A SOMERSET SKETCH-BOOK

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A Somerset sketch-book by H. Hay Wilson

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H. HAY WILSON

**A SOMERSET
SKETCH-BOOK**

A Somerset Sketch-Book

BY

H. HAY WILSON



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TO
PROFESSOR C. H. FIRTH
FORMERLY TUTOR AND LECTURER TO THE
ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION
OF WOMEN IN OXFORD

" You have fought so stoutly for us,
you have been so hearty in counselling of
us, that I shall never forget your favour
towards us."

The Pilgrim's Progress.

Many of these sketches appeared in the *Spectator*, and are reprinted here by kind permission of the Editor.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE MENDIP COUNTRY	I
A WEST COUNTRY VILLAGE	10
A SON OF THE SOIL	17
THE PLOUGHING MATCH	24
THE SHEEP-SHEARING	32
THE RAT-CATCHER	44
THE ARM OF THE LAW	59
A CENTURY OLD	69
THE WATERCRESS BED	78
BABYLON	101
PIXY-LED	108
TRAVELLER'S JOY	117
ILLUSION	123

viii SOMERSET SKETCH BOOK

	PAGE
THE WEEK BEFORE CHRISTMAS	128
THE WEATHER-GLASS	138
THE CHANGELING	157
GOBLIN COOMBE	172
WELL-WATER	182
A POET OF THE PEOPLE	189
LOCAL ANTIQUITIES	197
THE LUCKY BIRD	205
PARADISE	212
DUCKS	219

THE MENDIP COUNTRY

ON the northern side of Mendip there is a narrow valley winding inland a long way, very little above sea-level; on the other side there is a wide plain, equally low, stretching to the sea, and in the middle of this the Mendip Hills rise sheer up like a wall into the sky. So steep is their ascent that looking across the valley you are inclined to wonder how any wheeled thing ever gets up there, and indeed how the houses manage to cling to the sides without sliding down altogether. The fairy-tales of our youth used to tell of a hill of glass which had to be crossed by the bold adventurer; in winter the sides of Mendip are rather like that enchanted mountain. And when you do get to the top, past the house where the bladder-fern grows, the place looks as if, though not actually fairyland, it were very near the borders thereof.

Mendip is a great tableland, bare and wide, a lonely, windy place of rolling fields and long walls of mortarless grey stone, and there is always a great deal more sky than anything else to be seen there, because until you get near the edge of the plateau you cannot see the country below at all.

It is an extraordinarily desolate place, shut away by its height and flatness from sight and sound of the inhabited world below, the world of towns and villages and ploughed lands and tillage and pasture. So great is the feeling of space and so intense the solitude that a wanderer there could believe Mendip to be that "place between the worlds" which the spirits of the old Northmen haunted after they went away from the life of men on the pleasant middle-earth. The solitude of Mendip is not like the solitude of the Lake Country, where peaks crowd in upon the traveller's eyes and dominate the landscape with their memorials of legend and history. From below Mendip, Crook's Peak is seen as a landmark, but that is on the lower side of the range, near Axbridge and the Mendip towns and civilisation. On the real top of Mendip, above the wild Burrington Combe where the Blackdown barrows stand up more than a thousand feet above the sea, there is no peak among the stretches of field and moor and broken land that rise up on right and left and repeat themselves in an endless succession bewildering to the eye accustomed to steer by crest or wood or such prominent landmarks as any other place affords. Crossing to Wells from the eastern end of Wrington Vale, you pass over this high part amongst the cairns and barrows and deserted mines without going through the splendid Cheddar Gorge that winds down for a mile and a