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Edited by Rashleigh Holt-White
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The Life and Letters of Gilbert White of Selborne

Published in 1901, this illustrated two-volume biography of the renowned English naturalist Gilbert White (1720–93) presents a thorough account of his life and achievements. Prepared by White's great-great-nephew Rashleigh Holt-White (1826–1920), it incorporates a selection of White's correspondence with family and friends, providing valuable insights into his beliefs and character. Included are letters sent by White's lifelong friend John Mulso (1721–91), who praised the naturalist's work, predicting it would 'immortalise' White and his Hampshire village. Still considered a classic text, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* (1789), featuring White's careful observations of local flora and fauna, is also reissued in the Cambridge Library Collection. In the present work, Holt-White sought to correct the 'erroneous statements' that had previously been made about his relative. Volume 1 covers White's life and achievements up to August 1776, including his studies at Oxford and his ordination as a priest.

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VOLUME 1

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Gil. White Vicar.

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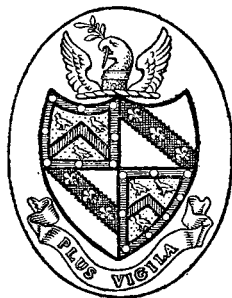
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THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF
GILBERT WHITE
OF SELBORNE

WRITTEN AND EDITED BY
HIS GREAT-GRAND-NEPHEW
RASHLEIGH HOLT-WHITE

WITH PEDIGREE, PORTRAITS, AND ILLUSTRATIONS



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET

1901

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TO
DAVID BINNING MONRO, M.A.

PROVOST OF ORIEL COLLEGE

FROM

A FORMER PUPIL

Floreat Oriel

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PREFACE

I DO not propose to offer any apology for publishing a *Life of Gilbert White of Selborne*; indeed, I think that an apology is due to the Shade of a naturalist who holds so high a place in the opinion and regard—I might almost say the affection—of his countrymen, that no authentic account of his career has yet been given to the world.

Nevertheless, though a knowledge of natural history is not, of course, the only qualification necessary in a biographer of the Fellow of Oriel, the life of a naturalist should have been written by a naturalist; a title to which I have not the slightest claim: and I am not sure that I should ever have printed anything, had I not observed with regret that erroneous statements concerning the philosopher of Selborne were constantly occurring, in proportion to the interest taken in him which seems to be ever increasing.

That many of the circumstances of his life should be mis-stated; that, for instance, he should have been wrongly represented as remaining single on account of an unrequited attachment; that mistakes, sometimes of a rather ludicrous nature, should have been frequently made about his relatives, his habits,

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and the Selborne of his time by writers who have perforce drawn upon their imagination for their statements—all this might be passed by with a smile by those who know the truth. But it is hardly a laughing matter for one of his family to read in a recent guide-book to Oxford (by J. Wells, M.A., Methuen and Co., p. 98), that Gilbert White “held his Fellowship for fifty years, and a living into the bargain, though it was shrewdly suspected that his fortune exceeded what the Statutes allowed: he shocked even his contemporaries by his non-residence and pluralism”; a passage which I can only characterise as a gross libel that the writer’s complete ignorance of the circumstances can barely extenuate.

It seems time, therefore, that the facts about Gilbert White’s life and surroundings, so far as they can now be ascertained, should be placed on record; and I believe that the admirers of his graceful writings will be glad to have an authoritative account of the Selborne naturalist—a man whose character need fear no scrutiny.

If, in dealing with these facts, I have not in one instance been able to avoid the element of controversy, I must plead that

“I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.”

At the request of several correspondents I have added a pedigree of the family as far as the generation succeeding Gilbert White’s; *i.e.* his nephews and nieces, who are often mentioned in his letters.

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To my cousins who have kindly allowed me to copy letters and pictures; and especially to the Earl of Stamford, who has placed at my disposal the long, and for my purpose invaluable series of letters to the Naturalist from his friend and contemporary John Mulso, my best thanks are due; as well as to Mrs. Inge, a descendant of Archdeacon Churton, who has kindly lent me the letters to him from Gilbert White. The Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society has been good enough to allow me to reprint from its 'Transactions' Gilbert White's letters to Robert Marsham. The Vicar of Selborne; the Rector of Fyfield; the present owner of "The Wakes"; Mr. Lazenby, of Basingstoke; and others, have kindly given me facilities.

Lastly, to Professor Newton my obligations are many and great. In addition to much valuable advice, he has been good enough to send me the natural history notes which appear with his initials.

R. H.-W.

New Year's Day, 1901.

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“How much,” said he, “more happy is the State
 In which ye, Father, here do dwell at ease,
 Leading a Life so free and fortunate,
 From all the Tempests of these worldly Seas,
 Which toss the rest in dangerous Disease ?
 Where Wars, and Wrecks, and wicked Enmity
 Do them afflict, which no man can appease ;
 That certes I your Happiness envy,
 And wish my Lot were plac'd in such Felicity.”

“Surely, my Son (then answer'd he again)
 If happy, then it is in this Intent,
 That having small, yet do I not complain
 Of Want, ne wish for more to it augment,
 But do my self, with that I have, content ;
 So taught of Nature, which doth little need
 Of foreign Helps to Life's due Nourishment.

“To them that list, the World's gay Shows I leave,
 And to great ones such Follies do forgive,
 Which oft thro' Pride do their own Peril weave,
 And thro' Ambition down themselves do drive
 To sad Decay, that might contented live.
 Me no such Cares nor combrous Thoughts offend,
 Ne once my Mind's unmoved Quiet grieve ;
 But all the Night in silver Sleep I spend,
 And all the Day, to what I list, I do attend.”

The Faery Queen.

“Your work, upon the whole, will immortalize your place of abode
 as well as yourself.”

JOHN MULSO ; 16th July, 1776.