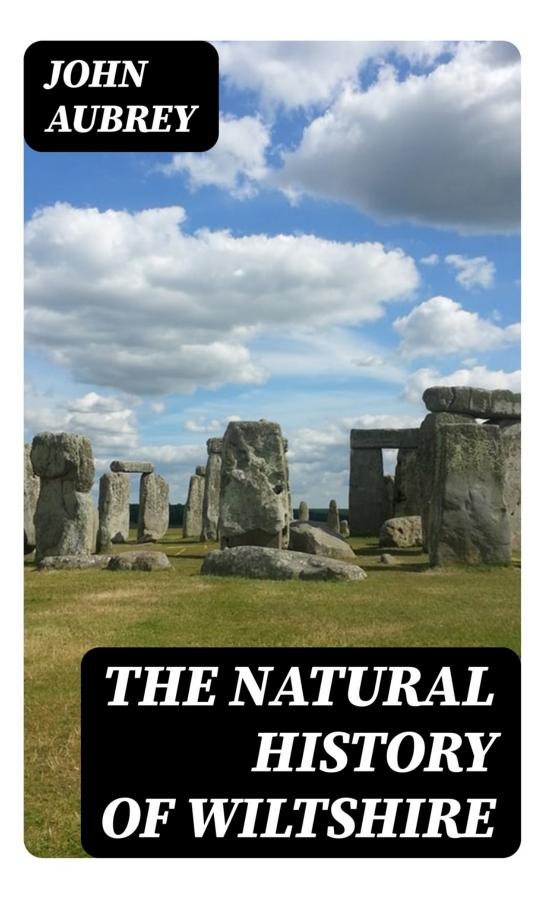


THE NATURAL HISTORY OF WILTSHIRE



John Aubrey

The Natural History of Wiltshire

EAN 8596547052746

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MEMOIRES

OF

NATURALL REMARQUES

IN THE

County of Wilts:

TO WHICH ARE ANNEXED,

OBSERVABLES OF THE SAME KIND

IN THE COUNTY OF SURREY, AND

FLYNTSHIRE.

BY

MR. JOHN AUBREY, R.S.S.

1685.

PSALM 92, v. 5, 6.

"0 LORD, HOW GLORIOUS ARE THY WORKES: THY

THOUGHTS ARE VERY DEEP. AN

UNWISE MAN DOTH NOT WELL CONSIDER THIS: AND A FOOL DOTH NOT

UNDERSTAND IT."

PSALM 77, v. 11.

"I WILL REMEMBER THE WORKES OF THE LORD: AND CALL TO MIND THY WONDERS OF OLD TIME."

GRATII PALISCI CYNEGETICON.

"O RERUM PRUDENS QUANTUM EXPERIENTIA VULGO MATERIEM LARGILIA BONI, SI VINCERE CURENT DESIDIAM, ET GRATOS AGITANDO PREBENDERE FINES ! ----- DEUS AUCTOR, ET IPSA AREM ALUIT NATURA SUAM."

то

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THOMAS, EARLE OF PEMBROKE AND MONTGOMERIE,

LORD HERBERT OF CAERDIFFE, &c.;

ONE OF THE PRIVY COUNCELL TO THEIR MAJESTIES, AND PRESIDENT OF THE ROYALL SOCIETIE.

[A page is appropriated in the manuscript to the Author's intended DEDICATION ; the name and titles of his patron only being filled in, as above.

The nobleman named is particularly mentioned by Aubrey in his Chapter on "The Worthies of Wiltshire", printed in a subsequent part of this volume. He was Earl of Pembroke from 1683 till his death in 1733; and was distinguished for his love of literature and the fine arts. He formed the Wilton Collection of marbles, medals, and coins; and succeeded John, Earl of Carbery, as President of the Royal Society, in November, 1689.- J. B.]

PREFACE.

TILL about the yeare 1649,* 'twas held a strange presumption for a man to attempt an innovation in learning; and not to be good manners to be more knowing than his forefathers. Even neighbours and to attempt an improvement in husbandry, though it succeeded with profit, was look't upon with an ill eie. "Quo non Livor abit?" Their neighbours did scorne to follow it, though not to do it was to their own detriment. 'Twas held a sinne to make a scrutinie into the waies of nature: whereas Solomon saieth. "Tradidit mundum disputationibus hominum": and it is certainly a profound part of religion to glorify GOD in his workes.

* Experimentall Philosophy was then first cultivated by a club at

Oxon.

Ovid. Fast.

"Deus est maximus in minimis. Prsćsentemque refert qućlibet Herba

Deum".

In those times to have had an inventive and enquiring witt was accounted resverie [affectation§], which censure the famous Dr. William Harvey could not escape for his admirable discovery of the circulation of the blood. He told me himself that upon his publishing that booke he fell in his practice extremely.

§ [The words inclosed within brackets are inserted in Aubrey's manuscript above the preceding words, of which they were intended as corrections or modifications. If the work had been printed by the author he would doubtless have adopted those words which he deemed most expressive of his meaning.- J. B.]

Foreigners say of us that we are "Lyncei foris, Talp domi". There is no nation abounds with greater varietie of soiles, plants, and mineralls than ours; and therefore it very well deserves to be surveyed. Certainly there is no hunting to be compared with "Venatio Panos"; and to take no notice at all of what is dayly offered before our eyes is grosse stupidity.

I was from my childhood affected with the view of things rare; which is the beginning of philosophy : and though I have not had leisure to make any considerable proficiency in it, yet I was carried on with a strong [secret] inpulse to undertake this taske: I knew not why, unles for my owne private [particular] pleasure. Credit there was none; for it getts the disrespect [contempt] of a man's neighbours. But I could not rest [be] quiet till I had obeyed this secret call. Mr. Camden, Dr. Plott, and Mr. Wood confess the same [like].

I am the first that ever made an essay of this kind for Wiltshire, and, for ought I know, in the nation; having begun it in An°. 1656. In the yeare 1675 I became acquainted with

Dr. Robert Plott, who had then his "Naturall Historie of Oxfordshire " upon the loome, which I seeing he did performe so excellently well, desired him to undertake Wiltshire, and I would give him all my papers: as I did [he had] also my papers of Surrey as to the naturall things, and offered him my further assistance. But he was then invited into Staffordshire to illustrate that countie; which having finished in December 1684, I importuned him again to undertake this county: but he replied he was so taken up in [arranging ?] of the Museum Ashmoleanum that he should meddle no more in that kind, unles it were for his native countie of Kent: and therefore wished me to finish and publish what I had begun. Considering therefore that if I should not doe this myselfe, my papers might either perish, or be sold in an auction, and somebody else, as is not uncommon, put his name to my paines; and not knowing any one that would undertake this designe while I live, I have tumultuarily stitch't up what I have many yeares since collected; being chiefly but the observations of my frequent road between South and North Wilts; that is, between Broad Chalke and Eston Piers. If I had had then leisure, I would willingly have searched the naturalls of the whole county. It is now fifteen yeares since I left this country, and have at this distance inserted such additions as I can call to mind, so that methinks this description is like a picture that Mr. Edm. Bathurst, B.D. of Trinity Colledge, Oxon, drew of Dr. Kettle three [some] yeares after his death, by strength of memory only; he had so strong an idea of him: and it did well resemble him. I hope hereafter it will be an incitement to some ingeniouse and publique spirited young Wiltshire man to polish and compleat what I have here delivered roughhewen; for I have not leisure to heighten my style. And it may seem nauseous to some that I have rak't up so many western vulgar proverbs, which I confess I do not disdeigne to quote,* for proverbs are drawn from the experience and observations of many ages; and are the ancient natural philosophy of the vulgar, preserved in old English in bad rhythmes, handed downe to us; and which I set here as "Instantić Crucis" for our curious moderne philosophers to examine and give {Gk: dioti} to their {Gk: hostis}.

* Plinie is not afraide to call them Oracles: (Lib. xviii. Nat. Hist. cap. iv.) "Ac primum omnium oraculis majore ex parte agemus, qua non in alio vite genere plura certiorara sunt."

But before I fly at the marke to make a description of this county, I will take the boldness to cancelleer, and give a generall description of what parts of England I have seen, as to the soiles : which I call Chorographia Super and Subterranea (or thinke upon a more fitting name).

London, Gresham Coll., June 6M, 1685.

[The original of the following LETTER from JOHN RAY to AUBREY is inserted immediately after the Preface, in the MS. at Oxford. It is not transcribed into the Royal Society's copy of the work. -J. B.]

FOR MR. JOHN AUBREY.

Sr,

Black Notley, 8br 27, -91.

Your letter of Octob. 22d giving advice of your safe return to London came to hand, wch as I congratulate with you, so have I observed your order in remitting your Wiltshire History, wch with this enclosed I hope you will receive this week. I gave you my opinion concerning this work in my last, wch I am more confirmed in by a second perusal, and doe wish that you would speed it to ye presse. It would be convenient to fill up ye blanks so far as you can; but I am afraid that will be a work of time, and retard the edition. Whatever you conceive may give offence may by ye wording of it be so softned and sweetned as to take off ye edge of it, as pills are gilded to make them lesse ungratefull. As for the soil or air altering the nature, and influencing the wits of men, if it be modestly delivered, no man will be offended at it, because it accrues not to them by their own fault: and yet in such places as dull men's wits there are some exceptions to be made. You know the poet observes that Democritus was an example -

Summos posse viros, et magna exempla daturos Vervecű in patria, crassoque sub aere nasci.

Neither is yr observation universally true that the sons of labourers and rusticks are more dull and indocile than those of gentlemen and tradesmen; for though I doe not pretend to have become of the first magnitude for wit or docility, yet I think I may without arrogance say that in our paltry country school here at Braintry - "Ego meis me minoribus condiscipulis ingenio prćlu[si]": but perchance the advantage I had of my contemporaries may rather be owing to my industry than natural parts; so that I should rather say "studio" or "industria excellui".

I think (if you can give me leave to be free with you) that you are a little too inclinable to credit strange relations. I have found men that are not skilfull in ye history of nature, very credulous, and apt to impose upon themselves and others, and therefore dare not give a firm assent to anything they report upon their own autority; but are ever suspicious that they may either be deceived themselves, or delight to teratologize (pardon ye word) and to make a shew of knowing strange things.

You write that the Museum at Oxford was rob'd, but doe not say whether your noble present was any part of the losse. Your picture done in miniature by Mr. Cowper is a thing of great value, I remember so long agoe as I was in Italy, and while he was yet living, any piece of his was highly esteemed there; and for that kind of painting he was esteemed the best artist in Europe.

What my present opinion is concerning formed stones, and concerning the formation of the world, you will see in a discourse that is now gone to the presse concerning the Dissolution of the World: my present opinion, I say, for in such things I am not fix't, but ready to alter upon better information, saving always ye truth of ye letter of ye scripture. I thank you for your prayers and good wishes, and rest,

Sr, your very humble servant,

JOHN RAY.

I have seen many pheasants in a little grove by the city of Florence, but I suppose they might have been brought in thither from some foreign country by the Great Duke.

Surely you mistook what I wrote about elms. I never to my knowledge affirmed that the most common elm grows naturally in the north: but only thought that though it did not grow there, yet it might be native of England: for that all trees doe not grow in all countreys or parts of England. The wych-hazel, notwithstanding its name, is nothing akin to the "corylus" but a true elm.

The story concerning the drawing out the nail driven crosse the wood- pecker's hole is without doubt a fable.

Asseveres and vesicates are unusuall words, and I know not whether the wits will allow them.

[The name of John Ray holds a pre-eminent place amongst the naturalists of Great Britain. He was the first in this country who attempted a classification of the vegetable kingdom, and his system possessed many important and valuable characteristics. Ray was the son of a blacksmith at Black Notley, near Braintree, in Essex, where he was born, in 1627. The letter here printed sufficiently indicates his natural shrewdness and intelligence. One of his works here referred to is entitled "Three Physico-Theological Discourses concerning Chaos, the Deluge, and the Dissolution of the World," 1692. There is a well- written memoir of Ray in the "Penny CyclopEedia," Aubrey's portrait, by the celebrated miniature-painter Samuel Cooper, alluded to above, is not now extant; but another portrait of him by Faithorne is preserved in the Ashmolean Museum, and has been several the times engraved. Α print from latter drawing accompanied the "Memoirs of Aubrey," published by the Wiltshire Topographical Society. Cooper died in 1672, and was buried in the old church of St. Pancras, London. Ray visited Italy between the years 1663 and 1666. J. B.]

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER. CHOROGRAPHIA.

[IT has been thought sufficient to print only a few brief extracts from this Introductory Chapter, which in the original is of considerable length. Its title (derived from the Greek words {Gk:choros} and {Gk: grapho}) is analogous to Geography. By far the greater portion of it has no application to Wiltshire, but, on the contrary, consists of Aubrey's notes, chiefly geological and botanical, on every part of England which he had visited; embracing many of the counties. His observations shew him to have been a minute observer of natural appearances and phenomena, and in scientific knowledge not inferior to many of his contemporaries; but, in the present state of science, some of his remarks would be justly deemed erroneous and trivial.

It will be seen that he contends strongly for the influence of the soil and air upon the mental and intellectual faculties or "wits", of individuals; on which point some of his remarks are curious. Ray's comments on this part of his subject will be found in the letter already printed (page 7). "The temper of the earth and air", in the opinion of Aubrey, caused the variance in "provincial pronunciation".

The author's theory of the formation and structure of the earth, which is here incidentally noticed, will be adverted to in the description of Chapter VIII. - J. B.]

PETRIFIED SHELLS.-As you ride from Cricklad to Highworth, Wiltsh., you find frequently roundish stones, as big,, or bigger than one's head, which (I thinke) they call braine stones, for on the outside they resemble the ventricles of the braine; they are petrified sea mushromes. [Fossil Madrepores ?-J. B.] The free-stone of Haselbury [near Box] hath, amongst severall other shells, perfect petrified scalop-shells. The rough stone about Chippenham (especially at Cockleborough) is full of petrified cockles. But all about the countrey between that and Tedbury, and about Malmesbury hundred, the rough stones are full of small shells like little cockles, about the bigness of a halfpenny.

At Dinton, on the hills on both sides, are perfect petrified shells in great abundance, something like cockles, but neither striated, nor invecked, nor any counter-shell to meet, but plaine and with a long neck of a reddish gray colour, the inside part petrified sand; of which sort I gave a quantity to the R. Society about twenty yeares since; the species whereof Mr. Hooke says is now lost.

On Bannes-downe, above Ben-Eston near Bathe, [Bannerdowne, near Bath- Easton.- J. B.] where a battle of king Arthur was fought, are great stones scattered in the same manner as they are on Durnham-downe, about Bristow, which was assuredly the work of an earthquake, when these great cracks and vallies were made.

The like dispersion of great stones is upon the hills by Chedar rocks, as all about Charter House, [Somersetshire,] and the like at the forest at Fountain-Bleau, in France; and so in severall parts of England, and yet visible the remarques of earthquakes and volcanoes; but in time the husbandmen will cleare their ground of them, as at Durnham-downe they are exceedingly diminished since my remembrance, by making lime of them.

The great inequality of the surface of the earth was rendred so by earthquakes: which when taking fire, they ran in traines severall miles according to their cavernes; so for instance at Yatton Keynell, Wilts, a crack beginnes which Longdeanes, in the parish, to and to runnes SO Slaughtonford, where are high steep cliffs of freestone, and opposite to it at Colern the like cliffs; thence to Bathe, where on the south side appeare Claverdon, on the north, Lansdon cliffs, both downes of the same piece; and it may be at the same tune the crack was thus made at St. Vincent's rocks near Bristow, as likewise Chedar rocks, like a street. From Castle Combe runnes a valley or crack to Ford, where it shootes into that that runnes from Yatton to Bathe.

Edmund Waller, Esq., the poet, made a quaere, I remember, at the Royal

Society, about 1666, whether Salisbury plaines were always plaines ?

In Jamaica, and in other plantations of America, e. g. in Virginia, the natives did burn down great woods, to cultivate the soil with maiz and potato-rootes, which plaines were there made by firing the woods to sowe corne. They doe call these plaines Savannas. Who knowes but Salisbury plaines, &c. might be made long time ago, after this manner, and for the same reason ?

I have oftentimes wished for a mappe of England coloured according to the colours of the earth; with markes of the fossiles and minerals. [Geological maps, indicating, by different colours, the formations of various localities, are now familiar to the scientific student. The idea of such a map seems to have been first suggested by Dr. Martin Lister, in a paper on "New Maps of Countries, with Tables of Sands, Clays, &c." printed in the Philosophical Transactions, in 1683. The Board of Agriculture published a few maps in 1794, containing delineations of soils, &c.; and in 1815 Mr. William Smith produced the first map of the strata of England and Wales. Since then G. B. Greenough, Esq. has published a similar map, but greatly improved; and numerous others, representing different countries and districts, have subsequently appeared. - J. B.]

The great snailes* on the downes at Albery in Surrey (twice as big as ours) were brought from Italy by ..-.., Earle Marshal about 1638.

OF THE INDOLES OF THE IRISH. - Mr. J. Stevens went from, Trinity College in Oxford, 1647-8, to instruct the Lord Buckhurst in grammar; afterwards he was schoolmaster of the Free Schoole at Camberwell; thence he went to be master of Merchant Taylors' Schoole; next he was master of the schoole at Charter House; thence he went to the Free Schoole at Lever Poole, from whence he was invited to be a schoole master of the great schoole at Dublin, in Ireland; when he left that he was schoolmaster of Blandford, in Dorset; next of Shaftesbury; from whence he was invited by the city of Bristoll to be master of the Free Schoole there; from thence he went to be master of the Free Schoole of Dorchester in Dorset, and thence he removed to be Rector of Wyley in Wilts, 1666.

* Bavoli, (i.e.) drivelers.-J. EVELYN.

CHOROGRAPHIA: LOCAL INFLUENCES. 11

He is my old acquaintance, and I desired him to tell me freely if the Irish Boyes had as good witte as the English; because some of our severe witts have ridiculed the Irish understanding. He protested to me that he could not find but they had as good witts as the English; but generally speaking he found they had better memories. Dr. James Usher, Lord Primate of Ireland, had a great memorie: Dr Hayle (Dr. of the Chaire at Oxford) had a prodigious memorie: Sir Lleonell Jenkins told me, from him, that he had read over all the Greeke fathers three times, and never noted them but with his naile. Mr. Congreve, an excellent dramatique poet. Mr. Jo. Dodwell hath also a great memorie, and Mr. Tolet hathe a girle at Dublin, mathematique, who at eleven yeares old would solve questions in Algebra to admiration. Mr. Tolet told me he began to instruct her at seven yeares of age. See the Journall of the R. Society de hoc.

As to singing voyces wee have great diversity in severall counties of this nation; and any one may observe that generally in the rich vales they sing clearer than on the hills, where they labour hard and breathe a sharp ayre. This difference is manifest between the vale of North Wilts and the South. So in Somersettshire they generally sing well in the churches, their pipes are smoother. In North Wilts the milkmayds sing as shrill and cleare as any swallow sitting on a berne:-

"So lowdly she did yerne, Like any swallow sitting on a berne."-

CHAUCER.

According to the severall sorts of earth in England (and so all the world over) the Indigense are respectively witty or dull, good or bad.

To write a true account of the severall humours of our own countrey would be two sarcasticall and offensive: this should be a secret whisper in the eare of a friend only and I should superscribe here,

"Pinge duos angues -locus est sacer: extra Mei ite." - PERSIUS SATYR.

Well then! let these Memoires lye conceal'd as a sacred arcanum.

In North Wiltshire, and like the vale of Gloucestershire (a dirty clayey country) the Indigense, or Aborigines, speake drawling; they are phlegmatique, skins pale and livid, slow and dull, heavy of spirit: hereabout is but little, tillage or hard labour, they only milk the cowes and make cheese; they feed chiefly on milke meates, which cooles their braines too much, and hurts their inventions. These circumstances make them melancholy, contemplative, and malicious; by consequence whereof come more law suites out of North Wilts, at least double to the Southern Parts. And by the same reason they are generally more apt to be fanatiques: their persons are generally plump and feggy: gallipot eies, and some black: but they are generally handsome enough. It is a woodsere country, abounding much with sowre and austere plants, as sorrel, &c. which makes their humours sowre, and fixes their spirits. In Malmesbury Hundred, &c. (ye wett clayy parts) there have ever been reputed witches.

On the downes, sc. the south part, where 'tis all upon tillage, and where the shepherds labour hard, their flesh is hard, their bodies strong: being weary after hard labour, they have not leisure to read and contemplate of religion, but goe to bed to their rest, to rise betime the next morning to their labour.

> ——- "redit labor actus in orbem Agricolae."-VIRGIL, ECLOG.

The astrologers and historians write that the ascendant as of Oxford is Capricornus, whose lord is Saturn, a religious planet, and patron of religious men. If it be so, surely this influence runnes all along through North Wilts, the vale of Glocestershire, and Somersetshire. In all changes of religions they are more zealous than other; where in the time of the Rome-Catholique religion there were more and better churches and religious houses founded than any other part of England could shew, they are now the greatest fanaticks, even to spirituall madness: e. g. the multitude of enthusiastes. Capt. Stokes, in his "Wiltshire Rant, "printed about 1650, recites ye strangest extravagancies of religion that were ever heard of since the time of the Gnosticks. The rich wett soile makes them hypochondricall.

"Thus wind i'th Hypochondries pent, Proves but a blast, if downwards sent; But if it upward chance to flie

Becomes new light and prophecy."-HUDIBRAS.

[The work above referred to bears the following title: "The Wiltshire

Rant, or a Narrative of the Prophane Actings and Evil

Speakings of Thomas Webbe, Minister of Langley Burrell, &c. By Edward Stokes. "4to. Lond. 1652.-J. B.]

The Norfolk aire is cleare and fine. Indigente, good clear witts, subtile, and the most litigious of England: they carry Littleton's Tenures at the plough taile. Sir Thorn. Browne, M. D., of Norwich, told me that their eies in that countrey doe quickly decay; which he imputes to the clearness and driness (subtileness) of the aire. Wormwood growes the most plentifully there of any part of England; which the London apothecaries doe send for.

Memorandum.-That North Wiltshire is very wormewoodish and more litigious than South Wilts,

[A Table of Contents, or List of the Chapters, is prefixed to each

Part, or Volume, of the Manuscript, as follows:-]

THE CHAPTERS. PART I.

1. Air.

- 2. Springs Medicinall.
- 3. Rivers.
- 4. Soiles.
- 5. Mineralls and Fossills.
- 6. Stones.
- 7. Formed Stones.

8. An Hypothesis of the Terraqueous Globe: a digression "ad mentem M{emo}ri", R. Hook, R.S.S.