

Old English Village Life as illustrated at Barrow and Twyford.

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IN looking back across the busy centuries in which our forefathers so strenuously played their part, we long sometimes to bridge the interval that lies between us, and to see what manner of persons they were, and what were the conditions, natural, territorial, social, economic, and, not least, religious, under which they lived. This ardent longing, the product of a mixture of powerful feelings, some of which have their roots far back in the past, does not always find its fruition. The far-off times do not speak to us always with the clear note of assurance and conviction. This is true especially of country life. Isolated facts there often are shining in their solitary splendour amidst much darkness, but the correlation of facts, and the construction of sober history out of their teaching are not always possible. And the men and women who fill these bygone periods with their interests and labours, modifying everything around them, may be dim and shadowy beings as we look upon them now, poor representatives of the original flesh-and-blood realities, with whom we seek to hold converse. And so we suffer disappointment. But, nevertheless at times, under favourable conditions, clear forms of men and things arise out of the haze, and it becomes possible, even within the narrow limits of one or two small parishes, to weave together the threads of a connected story, from which it is easy to deduce what are the common

features typical of country life in general, and what are also those special and characteristic features, which give to each parish its own peculiar distinction.

Can such a wide and general purpose be served by the special study of the life of these two parishes, Barrow and Twyford, which seem to be so remote and detached from the main currents of our national life? It is my belief that it can, and, the Muse of History inspiring me, I set out, with greater boldness, towards what, I trust, will be a partial achievement of that object. Go with me, then, to the country district which is under review, and try to understand, in the first place, its geographical bearings. It is a tract of agricultural land 4,100 acres in extent, and the river Trent between Swarkestone and Potlac in South Derbyshire is the southern boundary. Ingleby, Foremark and part of Repton lie facing us across this dividing line. Findern, with the dependency of Potlac, is the western fringe. Mickleover and Normanton look down from their heights in the north upon the broad moor of Sinfin as it slopes gently to the Trent Valley, in which the villages and hamlets lie. Osmaston, Alvaston, Chellaston and Swarkestone meet us along the boundary line of the east, which becomes somewhat vague and indeterminate as it crosses the wide moor. We lie, then, with our many broad acres, and our scattered homesteads and village groups, behind this ring-fence of well-known names. No part of the district is more than six miles, by the nearest route, from Derby. We are near the town, and yet sufficiently remote to escape the danger of absorption. These six miles are, in fact, a real and effective barrier, and they help to explain why, with a strong centralising movement, drawing men's minds away from the soil, and from the homes where they were reared, we are still able to live our own life with few gaps in the ranks, and to work out our own problems as typical country-dwellers.

And now let me ask you, after this description, to step across this ring-fence upon the ground selected for the construction of the story. You will find there two villages, standing at the

extreme ends of a loop in the Trent, two miles apart by road, four miles apart by river, the one Barrow or Barewe, according to the oldest extant document, the other Twyford. Further afield, away from the river and adjoining the moor, is a cluster of houses known as Arleston and Merrybower, and in a line with these half a mile further west, skirting the canal, is the hamlet of Stenson. Away to the north, remote* from river, road, railway, and canal, the four great intersecting lines, are a few farmsteads and cottages on the wide moorland of Sinfin. Barrow, Twyford, Arleston, Stenson, Sinfin, what do these names import? Three of these are topographical. Barrow refers back to the "barrow" or "mound" under which some chieftain lies buried; Twyford represents the "two fords" across the river at a given point; and Sinfin speaks of the "fen," possibly the swine fen, undrained, marshy land with coarse herbage and scattered clumps of trees, where herds of swine might roam at large and batten. In support of this conjecture is the wording "Swinfin," which appears a few times in the Parish Register, and as late as October, 1740. The two remaining names, Arleston and Stenson, Stein-ton or Stinston, are Anglo-Saxon in origin, as the names of neighbouring villages plainly testify. "Tuns" or "townships" are thickly scattered around us, pointing to a very definite and permanent settlement of these invaders. Osmaston, Chellaston, Swarkestone, Alvaston, Elvaston, and our own Arleston contain the names of individual chieftains, who settled down with their followers after the stress of conquest, to the quieter pursuits of agriculture. Weston and Aston are topographical, referring to their position to the west and east, and Stanton and Stenson or Stein-ton geological from the stony nature of their subsoil. As far, then, as our parishes are concerned, we find ourselves, through the evidence of place names, far back in the midst of possibly four Anglo-Saxon communities, if we reckon Twyford with Stenson, each recognizing the lordship or pre-eminence of a chieftain, each representing an industrial group perseveringly pushing afield against natural obstacles, and bringing the unreclaimed land beneath the yoke.

What remained of Romano-British civilisation was swept aside or sternly repressed. Anglo-Saxon laws, customs, methods, habits of life everywhere prevailed. The new settlements were stamping upon the country side strong traces of their power and influence. In fact, the manorial system had sprung into existence as a working reality. There was the Manor-house, the residence of the leader of the community, with his few dependents, and around it the demesne land, reserved for himself as his own special estate, and there was the village street, not much different from what it is now, if we replace wooden structures by those improvements in building which have come naturally with the march of the centuries, and not far away the land in villeinage, held in various degrees of dependence under the lord. There were some with small holdings, having their strips of ploughland and meadow, and the right of common pasturage, and there were others who corresponded more closely to the ordinary labourer at the present time. At Barrow and Twyford, including Stenson, the system was in working order, in all probability, at an early date. At Arleston and Sinfin the sorry condition of the land may have been, if not an insuperable obstacle, at any rate a serious check upon the progress of the communities which had settled there. They may well have been smaller and of less influence.

Strong marks of Anglo-Saxon dominion were left upon the soil, and during the same period of settlement religion took root, under the fostering care, we may well believe, of S. Wilfrid, who is the patron saint of Barrow. He was twice in Mercia; once, when banished from his northern diocese he sought in vain the shelter of the Mercian king; and again during the ten years in which he was Bishop of Lichfield. At West Hallam, at Egginton and at Barrow there are churches dedicated to this saint, and it is not improbable that these were then mission stations or praying crosses, where the folk of these and the adjoining villages gathered round him and heard his stirring message. The neighbouring chapelry of Twyford,

dependent from quite early times upon Barrow, was dedicated to S. Andrew, the patron apostle of S. Wilfrid, in whose name he built his stately church at Hexham. It may be an accidental nomenclature, but it is just as probable that the upgrowth of these churches was due to the encouragement of S. Wilfrid, who was so ardent a church builder, and that the twin names, S. Wilfrid and S. Andrew, were meant to bear permanent testimony to the influence and the predilection of that missionary. It was a time of religious awakening. The monastery at Repton was a centre of spiritual life. The royal court was stirred. Kings, princes, princesses, gave themselves up to the religious life. Guthlac, the ascetic, passed down the Trent by Twyford and Barrow on and on until he reached the fens at Crowland, where his name is commemorated in the foundation of its great Abbey. In this interesting period what wonder if Saxon churches were built, and if, in the industrial community around Barrow, there were energy and enthusiasm enough under capable directors, to build a simple wooden sanctuary as the monument of their faith.

Then came the fierce onset of the Danish invasion. In the memorable year 874, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* informs us, in a few brief sentences, how the kingdom of Mercia was subdued, Burgred, the king, banished, and the kingdom committed to the care of Ceolwulf, an unwise thane. The army was encamped at Repton, and, after quartering there for the winter, it departs. Three years later a large body returns, and the work of apportioning the territory begins. From the year 877 we may date this new departure, which had a marked influence upon these parishes. The old Saxon settlements became incorporated in the Five Boroughs. There were, no doubt, a few violent dispossessions; old lords and leaders were superseded, and Danish chieftains took their place, but, as far as the industrial system was concerned, it was continued with few alterations. The Saxons had laboured with much constructive ability, and the Danes entered upon their labours, and enjoyed the fruits of their wisdom and perseverance. Instances of

Danish names ending in "by" are Bretby, Denby, and Ingleby. Denby, the settlement of the Danes, speaks for itself. Ingleby, facing Barrow, points to a strong Angle settlement, which the Danes had conquered, and had left, it may be, in the possession of its lands and old-time privileges. Normanton across the moor, almost opposite to Ingleby, is a typical settlement of these Northmen; and the very names, Ingleby and Normanton, throwing out, as it were, a challenge to each other, point to that mixture of races—Angles, Saxons, Danes, Norwegians—who were to occupy the soil, and to become, after a later Norman influence had been brought to bear upon them, the Englishmen of the future.

Coming to the Norman Conquest, we find that, after the first shock, it quickened the tendencies which were already at work. The manorial system was, therefore, still further developed. The Domesday account of Barrow throws a clear light upon the industrial situation. The following are the brief records:—Under the lordship of Henry de Ferrers we are told, "At Barwe Godwine and Colegrim had three oxgangs* and a half of land to be taxed. It is waste. One villein has there four oxgangs and eight acres of meadow. In the time of the Confessor it was assessed at thirteen shillings and fourpence, but now (1086) at two shillings." Again, under the lordship of Ralph FitzHerbert, "At Barewe are twelve oxgangs of land to be taxed. In socage to Mileburne. There are a priest, and a church, and one socage tenant, with half a carucate† and eighteen acres of meadow." "At Twiforde and Steintune," under De Ferrers' lordship, we are told, "Levric had four carucates of land to be taxed. (Other) land three carucates. Now there are in lordship two carucates and four villeins and four bondsmen with one carucate and one mill at five shillings and twenty-four acres of meadow; woods, and pasture a quarter of a mile long by one broad. In the time of the Confessor they were assessed at £8, but now at £4. In the same place Godwine and Ulfstan have one carucate of land to be taxed. One carucate is waste."

* An oxgang was fifteen acres.

† A carucate was as much land as a team of eight oxen could plough in a year, viz., 120 acres or eight oxgangs (the long hundred).

We notice that part, perhaps the ecclesiastical portion, of the Barrow manor proper has been placed under the jurisdiction of the King's township of Melbourne, and the remainder recognizes the lordships of Henry de Ferrers and Ralph FitzHerbert. The industrial life is not seriously disturbed by these independent jurisdictions. What strikes us most is the small extent of land then under cultivation, and the few men apparently employed upon it; but this is explained by the general purpose of the survey, which was only to record those for whom the lord had to pay taxes to the King. Another noticeable feature is the remarkable drop in the value of the assessments of these three places since the time of Edward the Confessor. Perhaps the key to the explanation lies in the significant words, "It is waste." The hand of the Conqueror and of the Norman barons may have pressed hard upon these villages. Or it may be due to the disastrous floods, which have taught the farmer by long experience how fruitless is the task of ploughing and sowing so near the river bed. The name "Fenholmes" is still used to denote a strip of land near Twyford in this loop of the Trent, and it helps us to understand what must have been the wet, spongy nature of the soil with which the first settlers had to deal.

One pleasing feature in this Survey is the comfortable position of the villein, with his four oxgangs of plough land and eight acres of meadow, in all, sixty-eight acres. He was very similar to the later yeoman. Beneath him in status and in general comfort, and yet enjoying a certain amount of independence, there is another small class of men, unrecorded here, bearing a resemblance in some respects to the occupiers of small holdings, to whose existence a passing reference may be made if we are to understand the agricultural conditions of those times. The principle of the small holding was at work eight centuries ago, and it has in the parish of Barrow a comparatively modern exemplification. In the year 1847, the Beaumonts of Barrow, purchased by sale, from the Bristows of Twyford, seventy-two acres of land, henceforward known as "The Happy Meadows," and let them out to small holders in the form of allotments.

Each holder possessed a strip of plough land $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres in extent, one large furrow being the separating line. He held three acres of mowing grass, distinguished from that of his neighbours by a row of upright stakes; and he had the right of pasturage in the "Sich" grazing field, payment being made in this case according to the number of "cowgates"—the number of cows admitted into this enclosure. It was an experiment, lasting for about thirty years, the good effects of which we can trace in that expressive title, "The Happy Meadows," a phrase of the villagers' own creation. There is many a labouring man in this district who sighs for the return of these golden days.

Soon after the Domesday Survey the Manor of Barrow passed into the hands of the Bakepuze family, and was probably, as Dr. Cox has pointed out, part of the possessions of Robert Bakepuze, the benefactor of Abingdon Abbey. The members of this family were generous in their benefactions to the churches here in Derbyshire and elsewhere. Throwing themselves into the religious movements of those times, they were ardent supporters of the Crusades. Influenced by that semi-religious, semi-warlike temper, and possibly by the encouragement and example of Roger de Clinton, the soldier Bishop of Lichfield, who died on a crusade towards the end of the reign of Stephen, Robert de Bakepuze gave the church at Barrow to the Priory of S. John of Jerusalem, otherwise known as the Knights Hospitallers. With the church would be handed over the rectory and its lands, and either then, or shortly afterwards, a Preceptory house was built at Arleston, and other lands, distinct from the rectory estate, were attached to it. It was in the reign of Henry II. that the Hospitallers, encouraged by the Bull of Pope Innocent II., assumed a distinctly military character, and not only attended the sick and oppressed, but actively fought against the infidel. It was natural, therefore, that, at such a period, there should be many traces of the crusading spirit. It was strongly felt in Barrow. There was the person of the bailiff, who farmed the estate, always in evidence; and, no doubt, there would be the presence of many knights, or would-be knights, from time to

time, within the Preceptory. There was the constant witness of lavish hospitality, and of the keen desire to minister to the sick and afflicted. And, at heart, these men were deeply religious, and probably were the means of quickening the society around them.

It was in this period, under the Bakepuze family, with its strong Church leanings, and during the first century of the Preceptory's work, that the church at Barrow lost its Anglo-Saxon character, and became the lofty and spacious sanctuary which we see before us, with diminished glory, at the present day. The church at Twyford had profited also by the zeal and activity of those times. A fine Norman arch is still preserved, a proof amongst a thousand others elsewhere, that the Hildebrandine movement, and the new enthusiasm which came from abroad, were leaving the marks of their influence in obscure and unlikely corners of the land. And there was much, too, that was Early English. The glowing interest was not quickly quenched. It was kept alive for many generations. We see, then, once more, an awakening of religious life, similar, in its zeal and energy, to that earlier period which we have witnessed under the Anglo-Saxons. The Crusades must have contributed something at least, in these parts, to that religious revival. In fact, there is, in this neighbourhood, a very strong crusading tradition, which shows how much men's thoughts were coloured by the movement, and how durable were its effects. The Hospitallers' Church at Barrow, and the Preceptory at Arleston, are not the only evidence which we possess of that far distant enterprise. Swarkestone Bridge was built, if the story be true, because of the death by drowning of two knights returning from the Crusades. Anchor Church became the solitary cell of a knight who found that his lady had proved false on his return from the Far East. The Findern family, settled on our borders, were staunch Crusaders, and the Potlac cedar, in itself, or through some ancient predecessor, is still referred to as an interesting survival of those distant travels.

One close link of connection with another part of Derbyshire,

lasting through three centuries, was with the parish of Yeaveley, where a still larger establishment of the Hospitallers had sprung into existence. This foundation was known in early times as the "Stydd Preceptory,"* and it was founded in the reign of Richard I. From the date of its foundation, or soon afterwards, the Arleston lands were worked in connection with it, being under the supervision of a bailiff acting for his master, who would give his personal attention to the larger domain. We have evidence, thanks to the research of Dr. Cox, that the rectory lands were leased by the Order, not in conjunction with the Preceptory, but as a separate and independent estate. During the last century and a half preceding the dissolution of the Order, the Bothe family, holding the Manor of Arleston, distinct, of course, from the Preceptory, and succeeding to the Manor of Sinfin, by a business-like compact, were brought into still closer touch with the Hospitallers, living in the Preceptory house, so conveniently situated near the centre of their rapidly increasing estate, and renting the rectory lands. The last member of the family, who was buried with so many of his ancestors in the Arleston aisle at Barrow Church, speaks of "the chapell" at Arleston in a bequest to his son of "the westments, massbooks, portuses, chalises, and all that belongs to it." He was the last representative here of an ancient and distinguished family, from which, in these centuries, came a goodly line of Church dignitaries—two archbishops, two bishops, two archdeacons and others in a descending scale very comfortably placed. With the dissolution of the Order soon afterwards, in 1540, Judge Harpur of Swarkestone received a substantial slice of the rectory lands, becoming lay impropiator and receiving the greater tithes. The Beaumonts of Barrow secured the lesser portion, and became the patrons. Henceforth there is a vicar, very slenderly endowed, in place of the former rector, who had been comfortably established under the distinguished patronage of a privileged Order.

* It is significant on the theory of place-names that Stydd, near Ribchester in Lancashire, was also a Preceptory of the Hospitallers.

We have interesting evidence in *The Terrier* of the nature of the lesser tithe, and we cannot be too thankful that these payments in kind, with their troublesome and cumbrous arrangements, have given place to simpler and more satisfactory methods. The lesser tithe at Barrow disappeared in 1787, when an enclosure of meadow land adjoining the Trent was assigned to the vicar in exchange. For Arleston, some time before 1850, a rent charge had been paid in lieu of tithe, but in that year it was redeemed by the payment of a sum, in support of the living, to Queen Anne's Bounty. Three years earlier, in 1847, the smaller tithe at Twyford was commuted by the payment of a rent charge of £27 10s. The following extract from *The Terrier* will throw a clear light upon the previous interesting but antiquated system:—"For ten fleeces of wool, one fleece; for ten lambs, one lamb, due to the vicar; one fleece, and one lamb at 7, 8 or 9 allowing for the number they fall short of 10; for every cow and calf three half-pence; for every barren cow a penny; for every mare and foal three pence; for every messuage house with a garden 8d.; without a garden 6d.; for every cottage house with a garden 4d.; without a garden 2d.; for every hive of bees in lieu of tithe-honey and wax 2d.; for every tradesman's hand 4d.; every tenth strick of flax and hemp; every tenth strike of apples and pears; three eggs for a cock; two eggs for a hen; three eggs for a turkey cock; two eggs for a turkey hen; three eggs for a drake; two eggs for a duck; for every widower and widow as communicants 2d.; for every bachelor and maid, being sixteen years of age, 1d.; for every tenth goose, and tenth pig, one, and at 7, 8 or 9 as in wool and lamb. Two shillings in the pound for Tithe Herbage." It is a wonderfully complete catalogue, ingeniously devised to prevent any possibility of escape. The vicar in those days must have had an interest not altogether unselfish in the farm and farmyard, and must have been tempted to breathe the prayer of the Psalmist that our oxen might be strong to labour, and that there be no decay, and that our sheep should bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets.

The reference will be noticed in this and other old documents to sheep and sheep's wool. Sheep-farming from the Tudor period onward was the special feature in agriculture. It led to the breaking up of the lesser holdings, the enclosure of moors and waste lands, and the gradual absorption of small property by large landowners. There must have been an appropriation at this period of much that was waste and wild upon Sinfin, and no doubt there was a tendency to encroach upon the boundaries, and possibly to eject the small farmer. The name "Sinfinfold," with its abbreviation, "Sinfold," is in use from 1662 onwards, according to the testimony of the Parish Register, and it points possibly to an ancient enclosure. There must, indeed, have been many such "folds" or "intakes," as we say in the north, during the Tudor and Stuart rule. It is from the reign of Henry VIII. that the Harpur family—settled at Swarkestone, afterwards known as the Harpur Crewes at Calke—came into prominence, laying firm hold upon the lands around Swarkestone, Tickenhall, Littleover, Findern and Twyford. Undoubtedly, they felt the benefit of sheep-farming, and saw the advantage and necessity of extensive enclosures. As time went on, sheep-farming seems to have somewhat declined, and in the days of Charles II., for a few years at least, an artificial stimulus was given to it by an Act of Parliament which stipulated that people should be buried in sheep's wool. Our Register says: "Memorandum that in the 30th year of King Charles II. there was an order for burying in sheep's wool from Aug. 1, 1678, for seven years, and so on until annulled by King and Parliament." Observe, in passing, the expression, "the 30th year of King Charles." The writer need not have been a man of royalist proclivities. In the ordinary reckoning of that period Cromwell's Protectorate is merged in the reign of his successor. This short-lived measure was, at best, an artificial expedient. We find it revived again in the reign of George II., and carried out by the overseers and churchwardens, we cannot help thinking with a certain amount of lukewarmness, between 1736 and 1740. In a few instances, among the poorer people the Act was not observed. The following

extract, bearing date 1737, will serve as an illustration:—"9th Oct., 1737. Joseph Holmes, of Twyford, buried, being a poor man, and no affidavit of his being buried in what was made of sheep's wool only was brought to me within eight days inclusive, in default of which I gave notice forthwith to the proper officers, the churchwardens and overseers of Twyford." But whether this refers to the absence of the affidavit or to default in the burial is not quite clear. At length, by slow degrees, the growth of corn displaced the herding of sheep, and the latest enclosures in 1804, which certainly affected what remained of the common land on Sinfin, were made with a view to the encouragement of this growing industry. We are familiar with the causes of its decline, and the least observant of us can see many fields, once ploughed for corn, laid down for pasturage. Dairy farming is the most profitable form of industry now, but possibly better times may yet give heart to the farmer, and bring about a return to the old methods under more prosperous conditions.

The living, as we have seen, was sadly reduced in value after the dissolution of the Order of Hospitallers in 1540. There was not, until the last fifty years, a vicarage house. Under these conditions pluralism and non-residence followed as matters of course. The clerical duties at certain periods were conducted for many years by curates, whose faithful services may not have met, in some instances, with a too generous reward. Even as late as the second quarter of the last century the vicar of Barrow, from his post at Etwall, had the charge not only of Twyford, but also of Foremark and Ingleby across the river, and of a parish elsewhere, Newton-in-the-Thistles. He died in harness at the age of ninety. Added to these untoward circumstances was the troublous period in church life, starting with the Reformation, and causing anxiety and unsettlement until "the glorious Restoration."

Let us peep within the church at Barrow in the days of Edward VI., and let us look inside the vestry cupboard, as it was then. What do we find? "i. chalis of silver parcel gilt, iii. vestments, iii. albs, i. of silk and the other two of changeable

cruel, iii. altar cloths, i. cope of cruel, iii. towells, ii. corporalis with iii. cases, i. crosse of copper, i. cruyt of lead, i. bible with a book of comonen." There, in safe keeping and in actual use in the church were these outward indications of the services in these days. And let us notice, a little later, at least two vicars, one Gervase Wheldon, described in one document as "a man of no good repute." He conformed, we observe, to Cromwell's Directory, until outward conformity was no longer accepted. Daniel Shelmerdine, trained in the Presbyterian Classis at Wirksworth, was his worthy successor; one of the best of the new men whom Cromwell thrust into the vacant livings. In five years he was put out by the pressure of the Act of Uniformity. From those days the stream of church life has flowed on with few interruptions.

As for the people themselves, who form our industrial groups, they have passed, no doubt, through many changes, but there is, perhaps, nothing more surprising than the tenacity with which, through centuries, they have clung to the soil, and have resisted all unsettling and disturbing forces. The Sales, the Bancrofts, the Mathers, the Whitakers, the Camps, the Sharpes, the Holmes, the Kirkmans, the Garretts, the Bucknalls and others, have been with us, as the Registers intimate, for the past two hundred and fifty years. Who knows at what early period some of these first settled down here? The "Godwine" who appears in the Domesday Survey relating to Barrow has his modern representative, in name at least, in "Goodwin," the village grocer, who is doubtless quite unconscious of his Saxon ancestry. The stability of the families must have favoured a regular and continuous growth.

The rise of large estates has led to the decay and destruction of many dwellings. The small holdings have well-nigh disappeared, and those below the level of farmer, excepting the grocer, the smith, and the carpenter, are reckoned as labourers, who receive a weekly wage and live in a cottage, to which in some cases a little strip of ground is attached. In Barrow there are also small allotments, cheaply rented, which are a

great boon to the working men. We see, then, here a very wide interval indeed between the labourers, a very large class, and the farmers and wealthy residents above them. But, nevertheless, though in appearance they may be compared with the old cottars and bordarii, they have advantages unknown to the latter: cheap living, increasing comforts, high wages, and much consideration. They are far better housed and far better educated.

We notice, then, in conclusion, as the result of our survey of village life, the evidence of stability in the midst of change. What is light and superficial, representing only a passing phase, floats down the stream of time and leaves behind scarcely a trace of its presence, but that which is good and wholesome lives on from age to age. The threatened depopulation of the villages is a temporary movement, like the damp fogs in winter which hang with their heavy pall around us in the Trent valley, or like the water floods that rise and overflow our meadows. These things have their day and disappear, but there are good and permanent elements behind what is thus fleeting and transitional. We cling in simple faith to the things which are stable and unshaken, and we know that it is through the conservation of all that is best in our country life that we shall be able in the future to make steady progress in that slow and patient evolution from lower to higher forms, which has hitherto been evident in the country district, which has been the scene and groundwork of this story.