

EARBY OF LONG AGO

A STRANGER COMES TO EARBY

FORMER SCHOOL MASTER'S MEMORIES OF FIFTY YEARS AGO

Following an article by " J.H. " on the work of Mr. James Lindley, headmaster of the Earby Wesleyan School for 35 years, Mr. Lindley himself contributes in the following article his first impressions of the border town.

I have been asked to tell what were my impressions of Earby when I came as a complete stranger to the district just over 50 years ago. This was my first introduction to the uplands of my own country. It was in August and the exhilaration of the atmosphere gave one a feeling of buoyancy and energy. The heather was coming into bloom, and the thought of the air travelling over miles of fragrance was in itself most stimulating. Then from my bedroom I could see the purple hilltops, a completely new experience. One was struck by the irregularity of the village, and the stark bareness of the countryside. When taking walks, the sight of the many large tree boles in the hedgerow made one realise how lovely the scenery must have been before the woodmen did their sad work.

Most noticeable was the dreadful condition of the roads. Soon after we came, my wife and I were walking in the muddy curve about where the Bank of Liverpool now stands. Mrs. Lindley put her foot down and it came up minus the boot, which remained in the mire. I was compelled to carry her, and seat her on a wall, then go back and grope for the boot in the dark. The condition about Lane Ends was almost beyond description. It was no uncommon thing to see carts almost up to the hubs in water. Muck Street was truer to it's name than it is today.

To me , a lover of nature, the flora was most interesting and lovely. Primroses just abounded, I had often gathered a buttonhole of them in Langroyd Road on my way to the station. On one occasion a request was made through the school children for a few bunches for a funeral. The result was embarrassing- a clothes-basketful. Wild daffodils grew in isolated places. Lilies of the valley, butterfly orchids, oak and beech ferns were not uncommon. I have seen fine trout "guddled" in Wentworth Beck.

There were interesting old people living, who could tell stories of handloom weaving and packhorses, and could even point out the cottages that were thatched in their younger days. The people all received my wife and myself most kindly. Their hospitality was unbounded.

Baking in the home

All the women baked their own bread, and it was bread, too. The tea parties excelled anything we had ever seen. Each woman seemed to be expert in some branch of culinary art, and her particular ability was well known and oft in request. To attend a committee meeting where arrangements were made for such a feast was interesting. One heard such remarks as these. "Of course, Mrs. A. you'll make some of your teacakes." "We must have some of Mrs. B's tarts," and so on. No bought bread or confectionery was so much mentioned, and the net result was triumph. As the years rolled by a gradual change came which was not for the better.

Of course, the religious and social life revolved round the two churches, the Baptist and the Wesleyan. One was struck with the unity of purpose which animated both peoples. They had one Band of Hope and Temperance Society, which held its meetings in the institute. I think never was a village community blessed with such a band of able speakers and workers. All the local preachers and Sunday School teachers united in this work. There is inspiration in numbers, and this society had both.

The musical ability of the people was of a high order. There were few cottages without a musical instrument of some kind. The village could boast of some fine soloists. The congregational singing had both volume and tone. "While Shepherds" and "Crown Him" at the opening of some Christmas "At Homes" is a memory that still strangely affects me.

An Urgent Errand

There was no cinema in those days. Evenings were spent reading, music, self-improvement and meetings of various kinds. Earby had no resident minister, no doctor, lawyer nor architect. I had the experience of a hurried journey over the hill to Barnoldswick to fetch a doctor, and well remember the heart to heart talk we had when coming back. Fortunately it was a bright moonlight night. You may imagine what the same journey would mean on a cold sleety night to both doctor and messenger, yet that was a common occurrence. Earby itself, on a moonless night was bad enough, as the streets were not lighted; but that was child's play compared with the journey over the hills. Once when showing a stranger minister the way past Kay Fields, we found a family of four, father with child in arms mother with baby, who had been walking round the snow-covered field, vainly trying to find a stile till they were almost in despair. The heartfelt thanks the woman gave as I relieved her of her burden and led the way is still a vivid memory.

In many respects, Earby has wonderfully improved. The great opportunities that have been won by the people for secondary and more advanced education, the improved road and drainage conditions, the better water and gas supplies, the acquisition of electricity for power and lighting are all to the good, though the effects of bad trade are sadly too evident. Then where is the religious enthusiasm I found 50 years ago? At that time the deacons of the Baptist Church had weekly meetings for enquirers, which were largely attended. The Wesleyan class meetings were a living inspiring force. The preaching was earnest, the outcome of personal experience. The people had a mind to work for the highest interest of the community. The chapels were well attended by worshippers, who didn't mind a few grammatical errors so long as their hearts were warmed and their souls fed.

"Licking" the Carpet

My wife was not acquainted with the West Riding district, and I can still see the look of amazed enquiry she gave me, when, after asking a friend how she managed to clean her front room carpet, was told, "Why, John just hings it ower t' clothes line an' licks it."

I soon learnt to love the Craven folk, their children and their dialect. The first were warm-hearted and generous. Their quaint sayings were doubly humorous when given in the dialect. The children were intelligent and responsive, and it was a pleasure to teach them. The great bugbear to teachers was the half-time system. School inspectors made no allowance. They expected the same attainments from both half-timers and full-timers.

I was often disheartened after asking seemingly intelligent parents to allow a promising boy to stay full time a little longer to be met with the reply, "I went half-time when I was eight. It's a pity if he can't go at twelve."

These memories seem like a dream. Though I often longed for a wider sphere in which to labour, I am thankful now that thirty-five of the best years of my life were spent among the Craven hills in Earby.

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