DARWIN'S HOME.

The announcement that Mr. Darwin is to be buried in Westminster Abbey will be received with universal approval. No other place could so fittingly receive the mortal remains of the greatest scientific discoverer of his age and country. But though public honour will thus be done to his memory, the private dwelling-place of so eminent a man will always remain an object of interest to the educated world. It would not be easy to find within an equally short distance of London so retired, not to say inaccessible, a spot as the little Kentish village, which is thus destined to be for ever famous as the home of Charles Darwin. It stands out of reach of the railway whistle, far off the high roads to Limpsfield, Westerham, and Sevenoaks, upon a small stretch of table land, whence two straggling lanes, which cross each other in the centre of the village, descend to rise again with a steepness that a tired pedestrian would hardly care to encounter on a sunny day. It is in a country of chalk, as is manifest to the eye in the curved and grounded outlines of the hills, but unlike most chalk districts is in many parts well wooded, and this not merely with casual patches of copse or rings of firs, but also with many trees of noble growth. Fine beeches, rather backward at this high level, and only just beginning to put forth their long brown pointed buds, find hereabouts many a hollow and crevice of marly clay, whence their claw-like roots draw abundant nourishment. The famous beeches of Knockholt indeed stand but a short distance to the south, upon the hill-top, backed by the picturesque timber trees of Earl Stanhope's park at Chevening. The other way, across the narrow valley, are the shady slopes of Holwood, so closely associated with the names of Chatham, Pitt, and Wilberforce. By far the pleasantest route to Downe is over Keston Common, around the moss-grown oak fence of Holwood, or by the ladder-style on the summit of Keston Hill, across the park to the corresponding style opposite to the lane that leads, as a finger-post indicates, direct to the visitor's destination. Rising hence by a steep winding hollow way cut deep into the chalk rock, the stranger finds himself at length in the midst of rich and almost level pastures. Across these as the lane winds about, the ride-pointed spire of Downe Church, coated with slates, is seen from time to time rising from amongst the horse chestnuts, and the red-tiled roofs of the few shops and dwellings of an English village. Some large walnut trees, though now almost bare, cast in the summer time a pleasant shade upon the roadway from near the entrance to the village up to the low fence of the church, which is in the angle of the cross way in the centre of the place. Strange faces are not often to be seen in this part. In the winter time, when snow lies heavily in the deep hollow lanes, it is no uncommon thing for Downe to be practically limited to its own resources, and almost entirely cut off for days and even for weeks from communication with the outer world. That the village suffers in some degree from that common misfortune of the chalk downs, a scarcity of water, is to be inferred from the circumstance that the village pump, which bears the inscription, "Erected by public subscription for the use of the poor of this parish, 1845," is now locked to prevent extravagant consumption. A notice dated last year is, however, affixed to it, whereby, after a warning that it is "under the entire direction of the churchwarden and overseers," application for a supply of water "to any parishioner" is directed to be made "to Mr. John Palmer, who has charge of the pump." Perhaps a more striking illustration of the isolation of Downe could not be given than the fact that, although Mr. Darwin here breathed his last at four o'clock in the afternoon of Wednesday, the news which has since been received with profound sorrow in every part of the civilized world was not known in London until noon of the following day.

In this secluded and beautiful district, at some two or three hundred yards only on the further side of the village, the illustrious author of "The Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection," passed the last forty years of his laborious life. Having finally given up his residence in town in 1840, soon after his marriage, he found the retirement essential to his habits of systematic study and of patient investigation of the laws of nature; here in the old house which is soon to know him no more, he conducted those physical and other experiments and observations of which the results are recorded in that long list of works wherein the doctrine of [illegible] be said to be a retired spot, being fully rounded on three sides by the village street, from which it is separated only by a low wall; but it lies under the shade of tall elms, while near the porch a venerable yew, with a trunk measuring, it is said, nearly 23 feet in girth, adds to the solemn associations of the place. The church itself is small, consisting only of a nave and chancel, with a dwarf square tower and tall spire at the western end. Within are numerous brasses and other monuments of interest. The modern common plaster ceiling of the nave having been removed in recent years has revealed to sight a fine old timber roof, and greatly added to the picturesque though plain appearance of the interior. In the churchyard, near the south door, lie buried, as shown by the inscriptions on a flat tablet over the graves, the two infant children of Mr. Darwin, Mary Eleanor, who died in 1842, and Charles Waring Darwin, who died in 1858, being thus only two years old. Near them, under the melancholy boughs of the great yew tree, sleep two members of the Wedgwood family, to which, as is well known, Mr. Darwin was related by the side of his mother, as well as by his own marriage with his cousin, Miss Wedgwood. One of these is Miss Sarah Wedgwood, granddaughter of the celebrated manufacturer of art pottery—a venerable lady who had resided for many years in an oddly built old house with a lofty tower in the village, and who here went to her rest in November, 1880, at the ripe age of 86.

© Reproduced with the permission of Cambridge University Library

logical and other experiments and observations, of which the results are recorded in that long list of works wherein the doctrine of evolution has found inexhaustible illustration. "Downe Court" is one of the old square-built red-brick mansions of the last century, to which has been added in more recent times a gable-fronted wing, with another square-built wing and pillared portico on the corresponding side. Shut in, and almost hidden from the roadway by a high wall, and a belt of trees, it seems the very ideal of a place for philosophical seclusion. On the southern side the walled garden opens into a paddock or meadow equally retired, and bounded by a tract of underwood through which there is a lovely view of the narrow valley descending towards Tatsfield and Westerham. In these extensive additions to the grounds of Downe Court which Mr. Darwin had rented of his intimate friend and neighbour Sir John Lubbock, he had of late years been accustomed for the most part to take his daily exercise with the regularity which distinguished most of his habits. Up to ten or twelve years ago his tall figure, seated upon a favourite old black cob, was a familiar object in the lanes round about; but the unfortunate animal, seized with a fit one day, fell, and died by the roadside, after which it was observed that Mr. Darwin was never seen to ride again. His invariable hours for walking every day were seven in the morning, noon-day, and four o'clock in the afternoon, sometimes accompanied by his sons, one of whom, Mr. Francis Darwin, has long been established as a surgeon in the village, but more often alone. Rising always at the early hour of six to take his cold bath—into which he was accustomed to plunge both morning and evening—he breakfasted alone; and after his first morning walk was in his library as a rule at eight. At nine, when the post-boy arrived from Farnborough, he would spend a little time in the dining room opening letters, and skimming the papers, and in the evening would linger an hour or so in the society of his family, or of some of those friends distinguished in the world of science, who occasionally found their way to Downe-court; but the greater part of his time was spent in his library, his gardens, and the outlying parts of his little domain. When he extended his walks into the country round about, it was observed that he was rarely seen in the village or met on the roads, preferring, as he did, to take his way generally southward by the footpaths through the woods and meadows. Little children, who have a quick instinct for a kind and gentle nature, would run to open a gate when they saw Mr. Darwin coming, encouraged thereto by a smile and a kind word. Downe folk, by whom he was much beloved, like now to dwell upon these trifles, and to speak of his considerate kindness to all about him. They point with a sort of pride to the fact that the domestics at Downe Court are mostly old servants; that his maid Margaret Evans, who assisted in nursing him in his last illness, entered his service when a girl, at Shrewsbury, nearly forty years ago, her aunt and uncle being butler and housekeeper to Mr. Darwin's father, Dr. Robert Waring Darwin, in that city. The intelligence of his death came upon the place with a painful suddenness. It was known that he had been poorly for a few weeks; that it had been deemed advisable about a month ago to send a servant to London to fetch a chair, constructed for carrying an invalid, the weakness of the action of the heart rendering even the slight exertion of ascending the single flight of stairs to his bedroom perilous in the opinion of his medical advisers. But, with care, sufferers from heart disease often live long, and he was in the main still able to pursue his customary habits. On Tuesday morning his devoted friend and comrade in the field of science Sir John Lubbock called to see him on his way to his Parliamentary duties in London, and found him, as it seemed, pretty much as usual. That matters had taken a grave turn became known for the first time when, on Wednesday afternoon, his groom arrived galloping through the village upon a horse sprinkled with foam, and carrying under his arm a wet and dripping bag of ice. He had been despatched on a ride to Bromley, the nearest point at which such an article could be obtained, and had accomplished the ride of about twelve miles in something less than an hour; but unhappily the relief arrived far too late to be of service. The sufferer had already sunk to his rest, surrounded by his family, including Mrs. Darwin, several of his sons, and a married daughter.

The churchyard of Downe, in which some of Mr. Darwin's children are buried, was hardly

© Reproduced with the permission of Cambridge University Library