

**SEVENTEENTH CENTURY LIFE
IN THE COUNTRY PARISH,
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

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Seventeenth century life in the country parish, with special reference to local government by
Eleanor Trotter

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WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

BY

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Life in Olden Times in Babylon and Assyria.

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my beloved Father, JOHN OUTHWAITE TROTTER, whose public work during a life of 82 years spent wholly in the North Riding was witness that Englishmen give time and energy in as great a degree as formerly to the affairs of their district and county; and of my dear friend MARY LOUISA STRETTON without whose encouragement and help it might never have been written.

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PREFACE

IN the following pages an attempt is made to show how the ordinary business of government—the maintenance of justice and the preservation of law and order—was carried on during that most troubled period in the life of our race—the Seventeenth Century.

This generation has seen the horrors of the Russian Revolution and has noted in how many points it resembled the French Revolution. We look back with wonder and a certain admiration at the English Revolution, which was achieved in a very different manner; there was indeed loss of life, for the Puritans struck at the highest in the land, but they put their king to death because—rightly or wrongly—they believed he was the cause of the Civil War; nevertheless, in the puritan revolution in the middle of the century and in the political one towards its close, there is a moderation and restraint—a regard for political considerations which is not found in the same degree in the revolutions of other races.

During those years of civil and religious warfare in the Seventeenth Century, though there might be intolerance and harsh administration of the law owing to partisanship, yet there was no indiscriminate plunder, no ruthless slaughter of men and women without trial, while peace and order were steadily maintained in the country districts.

The machinery for the administration of the laws and the maintenance of peace was so decentralised that the life of the average man flowed on undisturbed, though faction poured out its strong currents of feeling and caused an ebb and flow of everchanging opinion at Westminster.

A comparison of revolutions gives rise to the thought that when a nation is faced with a crisis in its history, it is not

civilisation but character which is the dominant factor—not a specially formed and wrought out character but that which is inherent in the race, that which has been hammered out through generations of the national life.

The great majority of the men who took their share in the government of England in the Seventeenth Century had neither learning nor culture, some probably were not able to write their own names; nevertheless through being made responsible for the well-being and the good order of the little community to which they belonged they gained a considerable amount of political education. The work of local government, carried on voluntarily from father to son through untold generations, has produced certain characteristics—a moderation of outlook, a reasonableness and sanity of mind, an intensely critical faculty and a political insight—which are typical of our race. It is individuals who form the masses, and our history encourages us to expect that a people with such a record of governmental work has nothing to fear from further self-government. There is a fear lest the masses through ignorance of the work of their forefathers may demand a centralisation of governmental functions which is alien to the character of the English Constitution.

ELEANOR TROTTER.

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