

Until the beginning of the present century the principal representatives of the family were engaged almost exclusively in agriculture.

“ Along the cool, sequestered vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.”

Hence our virtues, our faults and our eccentricities have been those of a rural people—independent owners of the soil. Accustomed for generations to the seclusion of the farm, we have been somewhat exclusive in our associations; having been much alone for generations, we have become secretive and reticent, with too little regard, perhaps, for public opinion, or the opinions of others; used to the absolute rule of our own farms, we have become impatient of opposition.

Such a people have few temptations to crime. Their freedom from temptation coupled with favorable tendencies in the blood, and aided by favorable moral surroundings under Puritan influences, has produced one remarkable result. I allude to the absence of crime in the annals of this family since its settlement in America. Our American genealogy covers nine or ten generations, including the first settler, yet, it is asserted by those who claim to know, that in the last two hundred and fifty years, not one of the blood of Zachary Bicknell, bearing his surname has ever stood convicted in any court, of any crime, or misdemeanor, or fraud. If this be so, we have the noblest of all pedigrees.

But who was Zachary Bicknell? Whence did he come? What were his antecedents?

Undoubtedly he was of Scandinavian origin. He belonged to that great northern stock which regenerated the stagnation of the Middle Ages, and gave tone to the civilization of modern Europe.

His name is Swedish. The name Becknill in Swedish is equivalent to Brookhill in English; it was the name of the spot occupied by the family and with which they became identified.

I know of no records giving the date of the migration from that ancient seat to the British Islands, but there is a tradition in my branch of the family, that long ago, before the introduction of Christianity into Britain, and while the country north and south of the Tweed for many miles was an independent heathen kingdom, our ancestor brought his forces in ships and landed north of the Tweed, in what is now southeastern Scotland, and there maintained