

See also  
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## MR. ROBERT WHITE.

By J. CLEPHAN.

THE present volume of the Transactions records the loss of some of the more prominent members of the Society. Names long associated with posts of honour and of usefulness have passed away. They are enrolled in our annals, but those who bore them will take part in our assemblies no more. Mr. Robert White, who wrote the memoir of Mr. Hodgson Hinde printed on preceding pages, has himself departed; and also Dr. Edward Charlton, who attended him in his last illness. They were all of them contributors to the previous volume; their well-known hand is even visible in this; and now they have ceased to share with us in our proceedings.

The historian of "Otterburn," who died at his residence in Newcastle, No. 11, Claremont Place, on the 20th of February, 1874, was born at Yetholm on the 17th of September, 1802. His father, a small farmer, was one of those bold patriots who flew to arms on the false alarm of 1804, afterwards turned to such good account in "The Antiquary" by Sir Walter Scott, "the different corps of volunteers, on arriving at their alarm-posts, announcing themselves by their music playing the tunes peculiar to their own districts, many of which had been gathering-signals for centuries." The prompt response of the local forces, on both sides of the Borders, made it apparent to Napoleon how general and how enthusiastic would be the defence of the shores of Britain against any assault from France; and if invasion were ever seriously meditated, probably warded it off. In such a time it was that the infancy of Robert White was spent. His schoolboy days flowed by between Trafalgar and Waterloo; and on the acres which his father tilled he was early inured to toil. Occasionally, also, he assisted the neighbouring occupiers in reaping their harvests; some portion of his youth he gave to the workshop of a millwright, acquiring a knowledge of his ingenious art; and all his leisure time he devoted to books. "Reedsdale," writes a genial pen in the *Hawick Advertiser* (September 25, 1869), "saw his boyhood disporting itself in frolic and cow-herding by the pleasant haughs of Otterburn. There he got gristle and pith into his bones by hardy labour, and pleasant days of helpfulness to his father,

who rented a piece of land. There, too, he became smitten by the spirit of Border lore." "Born on the Scottish Border," are his own words, "and hearing from my parents' lips of The Bruce and The Douglas, and of the battles of Bannockburn and Otterburn, I desired as I grew up to know something of the lives of these men, and to wander over the localities where they led their armies to victory. In this way, when I came to reflect on the privileges which Scotland derived from the former of these battle fields, the place came to be regarded by me as hallowed ground." History, and legend, and song he eagerly devoured. His father's landlord at Otterburn, Mr. James Ellis, formerly a solicitor in Newcastle, kindly granted him the use of his library. The spell of the Northern Wizard had then fallen on his countrymen; and one of the kindly loans to the farmer's son was "The Lady of the Lake," with which he was so fascinated that he copied the poem, every word, into a paper book, in the fair, clear hand, which became so perfect by prolonged practice. Thus, then, diligent and thoughtful, studious and industrious, the young Borderer rose to manhood; and now he looked about him for some new sphere of labour, where he might have larger means and wider opportunities of usefulness. The "Memoir of the Rev. John Hodgson," by the Rev. Dr. Raine, affords us a glimpse of him at this early period of his life. "He was for many years, and continues to be," says the historian of North Durham in 1858, "a profound admirer of Hodgson and his character. So far did he carry this feeling, that once upon a time, (I have it from himself,) he would fain have become the village schoolmaster at Whelpington, that he might be near the object of his admiration, and help him with his pen in his vacant hours." "I hope," adds Dr. Raine in a note, "I may not be guilty of any breach of confidence when I make the following extract from what in strictness of speech was intended as a private communication. The feeling which it betrays is too rare and creditable to be kept a secret:—'Before coming to Newcastle, I was nearly brought into a position that would have given me many opportunities of being better acquainted with Mr. Hodgson. In 1825, about the time when haycutting commences, I learned that a teacher was wanted for the school at Whelpington; and knowing that Mr. Hodgson was closely occupied in writing his great work, I felt desirous above all things to be near him. Hence I became a candidate for the appointment. Had I attained the office I then sought, I cannot tell you with what alacrity and devotedness I had entered into every kind of work by which, during my leisure hours, I could have been of use to that remarkable man. Copying manuscripts, surveying old camps, &c., would have brought me into my proper element; and the whole would have been to me a labour of love.'"

It was in the same year that Mr. Ellis, ever anxious to advance his interests, wrote to Mr. John Watson, of the Edinburgh Tea Warehouse, whose shop in Union Street, at the head of the Cloth Market and the Middle Street, faced the Bigg Market. Tea Warehouse and Middle Street have since gone; Town Hall and Corn Exchange cover the site; and Newcastle has lost one of the quaintest features of the olden times. Mr. Ellis inquired if Mr. John Watson knew of any opening suitable for a steady and intelligent young man? Mr. Robert Watson, of the High Bridge, plumber and brass founder, was in the daily habit of looking in upon his neighbour the grocer. They bore the same name, and were great friends, though not relatives; and the application from Otterburn was named between them. The mention was seasonable. Robert Watson was in want of such a youth, and wrote at once to Mr. Ellis, asking a question or two, and requesting a specimen of his protégé's handwriting. The answers were satisfactory, the penmanship all that could be desired, and an engagement was made. Robert White came to Newcastle in 1825, and bound himself to the employer in whose counting-house he remained about forty years. Death alone separated them; and his friend and master, appreciating his worth, left him one of his executors.

A book-buyer when his means were small; always enabling himself, by careful thrift, to add to the well-chosen contents of his shelves; Mr. White's library eventually became one of the most extensive and valuable in the North of England. The ploughboy who had copied the poem of Sir Walter Scott, could not fail to gather books about him according to his resources; and some spare cash for literature he constantly found, even when his income was but on a par with "the village preacher's" of Goldsmith's song. Surrounded by his growing literary stores, he lived to old age, his rare and varied library the visible expression of his cultured mind—the outward manifestation of the inward man. He had learnt to know and value good books, and made them the companions of his daily life. He also added his own name to the roll of writers in prose and verse; his first work, written in 1829, being "The Tyne-mouth Nun, a Poem;" and it is pleasant to remember that one of the founders of this Society, for a long course of years its Secretary, was instant in his encouragement of the author. "When I had written out a fair copy," says Mr. White in a preface to his reprint of 1858, "I sent it to Mrs. Ellis of Otterburn, a lady who had always conducted herself towards me with much kindness, and to whom I afterwards dedicated the poem. Her husband, Mr. Ellis, subsequently transmitted the manuscript to Mr. Adamson of this town, who waited upon me with it, and entreated me to allow the piece to be printed for the Typographical

Society of Newcastle, to which I assented." And thus it was that Mr. White first came before the public, to whom he so often afterwards presented the fruits of his leisure moments; his last volume of "Poems" appearing in 1867, and including his "Epistle" of 1848 "to Mr. James Telfer, Saughtree, Liddesdale,

"The friend whom I have longest known."

In these verses he recurs to their early days, when together they feasted with the sons of song, and "murmured not, though they were poor."

Well I remember when, by turns,  
 We onward read, and relished high,  
 The soul-inspiring verse of Burns,  
 The Ettrick Shepherd's minstrelsy.  
 Sir Walter's bold, heroic lyre,  
 Evoked at once our warmest praise;  
 And full we felt the force and fire  
 Of Byron's powerful, thrilling lays.

Chaucer and Spenser, Shakspeare and Milton, beguiled the passing hour, oft "seated in some nook of earth, or wandering on o'er field or moor," admitted by books to the society of the highest and the best; and when, in the year 1857, having taken up materials which had been "lying untouched for a quarter of a century," he brought them before the world, expanded over nearly two hundred pages of print, in the form of a "History of the Battle of Otterburn," he acknowledged in his preface the many services rendered him on all sides, his warm gratitude was expressed to "an old, a true, and a valued friend," James Telfer. "At all times," said the historian, "he has responded most devotedly to my wishes, and in no instance, on my part, has any appeal to his judgment been made in vain."

Next year, Mr. White brought out an edition of the Poems and Ballads of Dr. John Leyden, born like himself in Roxburghshire, a farmer's son; and to the life written by Sir Walter Scott, he added a supplementary memoir of his own.

The "Otterburn," published in 1857, gave its author an enduring place in the historic literature of the country. He had already, in 1856, read a paper at a field meeting of the Society, narrating the story of the battle of Neville's Cross on the scene where it was fought, (*Archæologia Eliana*, N. S., i., 271); and Mr. Hodgson Hinde, in his continuation of "Hodgson's History of Northumberland," singled him out as the most appropriate chronicler of Flodden fight. Dr. Raine also, commending "Otterburn" as "a publication very remarkable for its judicious arrangement and fidelity of narrative," bound him down to the task

“The faithful and gentlemanly way in which Mr. White has executed his undertaking,” observed the biographer of Hodgson, “prompts a hope that he may be inclined to turn his mind and pen to the still more ‘dismal tale’—

Of the stern fight and carnage drear  
Of Flodden’s fatal field,  
Where shivered was fair Scotland’s spear,  
And broken was her shield.

For such a task the materials are rich and abundant; and well do they deserve to be sifted and concentrated into a readable book upon the comprehensive but unpretending plan of ‘The Battle of Otterburn.’”

This hope found expression in 1858; and in the summer of that year, the Society assembled on Branxton Moor, when “The Battle of Flodden” was read, (*Archæologia*, N. S., iii, 197). One more historical work was still in store for Mr. White. It had long occupied his thoughts, and in his latter years he set himself to its accomplishment. “Mr. White, (said his friend “T. H.,” already quoted, in the autumn of 1869,) has told the story of various battles, but one remains yet to be recorded, that of Bannockburn. A notice recently appeared in the *Athenæum*, that he was engaged on a work of this kind. Scotland more and more lends an ear to any one who will repeat the tale of that great deciding battle. Who would not gather round were it only an old pensioner on sixpence a day to hear from him the story of Waterloo? Bannockburn was the best summer day’s darg Scotland ever did. She put in the sickle, and reaped a great harvest, which has filled her barns and fed her children with the food of freedom and stout-hearted exultation; and we will never tire of listening to the way and manner in which she went about the work, and we will be all the more pleased that Robert White recounts it.” It was recounted in 1871; and at the annual meeting of the Society, held in the month of February, 1872, reference was made in the Report of the Council to this last work of our departed fellow-member. He was then in his seventieth year, and with apparent promise of long life to come. But the prospect was not fulfilled: two years only remained to him. His was, however, a good old age, to which he had arrived with almost unbroken health on the way; and he had lived long enough to teach an admirable lesson to our race. Born to an humble lot, the son of virtuous and intelligent parents, he walked in the way of industry, winning knowledge and culture as he went. Temperate in all things, he so husbanded his means that he could continually be adding to what he well described in verse as

The rich bequests of those inspired  
To elevate and teach mankind.

Confidence and respect, and the fruits of faithful service, came to him by natural law. He attracted the good opinion and esteem of those around him. He gained the applause to which the Roman orator assigns peculiar weight—"the praise of those who deserve praise;" and his declining days were spent in honourable ease, to which literary labour lent a zest, and foreign travel, and converse with men and books.

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### ROMAN WHEEL FROM THARSIS, IN SPAIN.

A PORTION of a Roman water wheel of wood was lately sent to me from the mines of Tharsis, in Southern Spain, in the ancient workings of which it was found. At the suggestion of Dr. Bruce, and with his kind assistance, I have set it up here for the inspection of the members of this Society, some of whom may, perhaps, be able to throw some light on the mode in which the motive power was supplied to these wheels. At present this seems to be unknown. They are not water wheels in the usual sense of the term. They are curious, as having been used as lifting pumps to draw the mine. During a yachting cruise last summer, I visited the mine, and with your permission I shall shortly lay before you the information I gathered on the spot regarding these wheels, several of which have been found *in situ* on the north side of the mine.

Where the outspurs of the range of hills called the Sierra Morena die away towards the sea, to the north of the Bay of Cadiz, there have been found some of the richest mineral deposits in Spain. In this district, iron, copper, lead, zinc, arsenic, antimony, bismuth, nickel, silver, and gold, have been found in quantities very much in the order in which I have given them. That this district is the Tarshish of ancient history there can be little or no doubt. The mine from which that wheel was taken is still called Tharsis; and in the same province of Huelva, a high hill near Rio Tinto still bears the name of Solomon, and close by a little village is named Zalomea. The mine of Tharsis is situated about thirty miles from the town of Huelva, which lies not far from the junction of the rivers Odiel and Tinto, and close by is the little town of Palos, and the convent of La Rabbida, from which Columbus sailed with his three small vessels to discover the new world. The galleries by means of which the Tharsis mine, in ancient times, was worked, are of two kinds, square and round. The square galleries are believed to be Phœnician, and the round Roman. I regret that I have