

X.—SUGGESTIONS FOR A NEW COUNTY HISTORY OF
NORTHUMBERLAND.

By THOMAS HODGKIN, D.C.L., &c.

[Read on the 28th May, 1890.]

BEFORE entering upon the consideration of the best mode of compiling a history of the County of Northumberland, it will be well briefly to resume what has been already done in that direction by the Rev. John Hodgson, and the manner of his writing.

Hodgson's plan, as set forth on the cover of the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1819, was to build his great history in three compartments. The part which was to be first published, but which was to be last in the completed work, was to contain the chief documents bearing on the history of the county, to be in fact a collection of what the French call 'Mémoires pour servir.' The toil of editing and collating these various documents was to be preliminary to that of the composition of the second part of the history in which the various parishes of Northumberland were to be described *seriatim*, and a large amount of family history, illustrating the collected documents, and vouched for by them, was to be interwoven with the description of the churches and other monuments of antiquity remaining in each parish.

Lastly, the materials thus collected were to be drawn together into one general history of the whole county, taking a broad view of the political, social, and economic changes which had taken place in Northumberland from the earliest times to our own day. This part, last of all in execution, the result of the matured judgment of the historian acting upon the materials which he had collected by a life's labour, was to have been the first part and the first volume of the history.

It was a grand and a truly scientific conception which Mr. Hodgson formed of the duties of a county historian, and if he had possessed uninterrupted leisure and the power of freely commanding the labour of others, to lighten the mechanical drudgery of his task, it might possibly have been realised. As it was, the country clergyman, able to give only a portion of his time to the work, and obliged to send 'every line and letter, from notes to indices, to press in his

MAP OF NORTHUMBERLAND

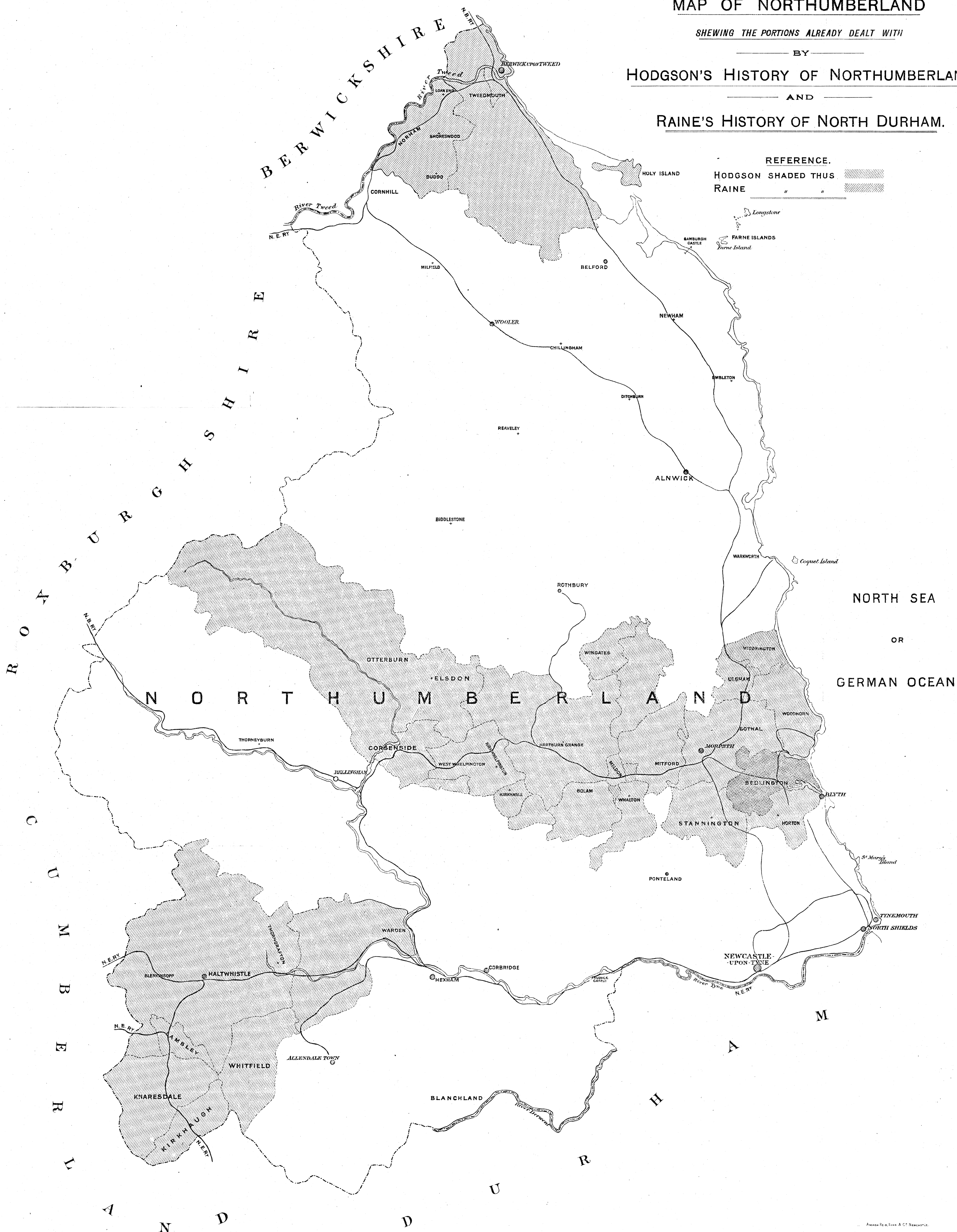
SHEWING THE PORTIONS ALREADY DEALT WITH

BY

HODGSON'S HISTORY OF NORTHUMBERLAND

AND

RAINE'S HISTORY OF NORTH DURHAM.



own writing,' died with a sad consciousness that he had 'lived to write scarce a third of what he had contemplated.' 'I have sketched out,' he says, 'an extensive plan, and feel myself daily more able to fill up and finish its details, but want other hands to fill in the outlines. There is an immense loss of time in researches, whereas if each clergyman would send me extracts from his parish registers, respecting all families that have been eminent in the county or by connection with it, and all families allow me a free use of their papers for genealogical purposes and the history of their own or other families that have lived upon their estates, or even allow me at home the use of the abstract of their deeds, I might progress in my work with reasonable speed.'

Let us now then sum up what part of Hodgson's great design was actually accomplished. The first part, the general history of the county, remained, as far as he was concerned, unwritten. Of the second part, three volumes appeared containing the history of twenty-two parishes, and some dependent chapelries, and this most valuable work constitutes for the ordinary reader Hodgson's *History of Northumberland*. The accompanying map will show what proportion the described portion bears to the whole county. I have not calculated the acreage, but I imagine that the parishes described by Hodgson cover about a third of the county; and this agrees with his own expression, quoted above, that he had written scarce a third of what he contemplated.

What he has written completes the 'History of the Morpeth Deanery, a district which extends throughout the heart of the county from the border of Scotland, or Carter Fell, to the German Ocean, and comprises nearly the whole of Morpeth Ward, and considerable portions of Castle, Coquetdale, and Tindale Wards.' It also includes six parishes and one extra-parochial district in the south-west corner of Northumberland forming part of Corbridge Deanery. One of these is the large and important parish of Alston, which does not belong to Northumberland. It is important to remember this, since in this way Hodgson's book, though in many ways less, is also something more than a history of the whole county. The last volume of the second part, which contains these south-western parishes, also contains a very full and valuable treatise (occupying about 180

closely-printed pages) concerning the Roman Wall. We may perhaps look on this treatise as containing the marrow of what Hodgson would have had to say about the Roman occupation of North Britain had he lived to write the first part of his history.

The third part, consisting of three volumes of 'Mémoires pour servir,' is the only one which the author seems to have looked upon as complete. There can be doubt as to the value of much of the material here collected; but probably it would now be generally admitted, on the one hand, that the labour and cost of publishing documents of this kind should not be left to fall upon an individual of some somewhat slender means, but should be undertaken by a society; and on the other hand, that when published they should be issued to a special body of subscribers, who are prepared to receive them sympathetically, and should not be included in an ordinary county history.

In order to complete our survey of what has been done it remains to mention that the Society of Antiquaries in 1858 published a volume by the late John Hodgson Hinde, which was intended to fill the place of the never-written *first* part of Hodgson's history.¹ Mr. Hodgson Hinde was a most able and competent scholar, and though his volume lacks a certain personal element which interests us in Hodgson's work, it is an exceedingly useful contribution towards the general history of Northumberland. For the Saxon and Danish period I venture to think it is almost all that we could desire; somewhat less adequate perhaps for the Norman and Plantagenet period, and surely far too slight in its notice of the Tudor and Stuart periods, which are dismissed in sixty-eight pages, while the Brunswick period is scarcely noticed at all.

There are some other works besides Hodgson's which should be noticed here, as they do in some measure supply that which he has left undone. The *History of North Durham*, by the late James Raine, the friend and biographer of Hodgson, deals with the history of the parishes of Norham and Islandshire, as well as Bedlington (in which last he traverses the same ground as Hodgson). Tate's *History of Alnwick*, in two volumes, octavo, Ridpath's *Border History*, and

¹ The chapter on the Roman Wall in this volume was contributed by Dr. Bruce.

Wilson's *Churches of Lindisfarne*, all furnish valuable contributions to the history of our county.

After this slight survey of what has been already done for the history of Northumberland, we may ask ourselves what is the best course for us now to pursue in order to put within the reach of the people of Northumberland some accurate account of the past history of their land. At present prices a complete copy of Hodgson's history costs £40, and is practically beyond the reach of all but the very wealthiest of our fellow-citizens; nor is it easy to procure a copy even at that price. If we can do nothing else, I should strongly advocate the reissue of the second part of Hodgson's history, with Hodgson Hinde's first part, in an octavo form. I have no doubt that this could be published at £1 a volume (£4 in all) so as to leave the publishers a reasonable profit. Or if it were thought more desirable, subscriptions could be invited, and on a sufficient number of subscribers' names being procured, the work might be undertaken by the Newcastle Society of Antiquaries.

Moreover, it is well known that Mr. Hodgson left behind him a large number of MSS. relating to the unfinished portion of his history. These materials are admirably arranged, and indices of the most elaborate kind show how each document, and each newspaper cutting, illustrates the history of every parish. In handling these volumes, and mentally calculating the number of hours of labour that must have gone to the production of each of them, the beholder's heart sinks within him, and he no longer wonders that the venerable historian's strength gave way before he had been able to complete his gigantic labour. His descendant, Mr. J. W. Hodgson, has generously offered to allow these collections to be made use of by the Society. If the course above hinted at be pursued, probably one or two supplementary volumes might be published, consisting of the more generally interesting part of the Hodgson manuscripts.

But, after all, we shall thus still be left only in possession of a fragmentary and imperfect history of our north country; and the capital of it—which, as it will be observed, is not dealt with by Hodgson's history—will be left undescribed in the county history, though Bourne, Brand, Mackenzie, Longstaffe, Welford, and Boyle, make our deficiencies in this respect much more tolerable.

What I feel (and I believe many others sympathise with me) is that the true way of honouring Hodgson's memory is to set about the completion of his great work. This cannot be done now, I venture to think, by any one man, however learned and zealous. The field of research² has widened since Hodgson's day, and a greater variety of information will be required by the larger class of readers to whom we shall have to minister. Besides, the labour of collection of so large a mass of materials as is required for the history of a great county is enough for at least one lifetime, and the collector finds that his writing-time is over just when he ought to be giving the result of his long labours to the public. The disappointment arising from this inexorable limitation of the human powers did something to break the heart of that one arduous toiler, and I fear the same result would await any successor who should try to take up the unfinished task.

But 'many hands make light work,' and the result which is unachievable by one, or even two, may easily and delightfully be accomplished by many. As examples of successful literary co-operation I would point to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and Smith's *Dictionaries of Classical and Ecclesiastical Biography*, works which are almost indispensable to the student, and which, whatever may be their defects, are, upon the whole, accurate and consistent, and present a sufficient unity of style notwithstanding the multiplicity of their authorship.²

Now, if a person were appointed editor, with plenary powers to obtain from all our Northumbrian archaeologists the best that they could contribute towards the production of a work that should rank high amongst the county histories of England—I admit that the hypothesis is a bold one—how should such a literary autocrat assign the work to his fellow-labourers?

I think he would do wisely to keep up Hodgson's division of his work as far as Part I. and II. are concerned, while leaving Part III., if undertaken at all, to be dealt with by some special organisation such as the Surtees Society.

To Part I. he might assign two volumes, which should deal with the general history of Northumberland.

² The *Dictionary of British Biography*, now in course of publication under the editorship of Mr. Leslie Stephen, seems likely to be another successful monument of literary co-operation.

The first chapter (which might suitably be assigned to Professor Lebour or Mr. Topley) should deal briefly, and in a popular manner, with the geology of the county. Avoiding technical terms as much as possible, the writer brings before us, in graphic language, the successive upheavals and depressions of the land's surface, the formation of the coal-beds, the streams of glowing basalt that flowed across the county from Thirlwall to Bamborough, the operation of the glaciers that rounded the cones of the Cheviots, the changes wrought by the Tyne on its way from Cross Fell to the sea.

In the next chapter Canon Greenwell and the Rev. G. Rome Hall describe pre-historic Northumberland by the light of the knowledge which they have gained in their excavations upon our moors. They reproduce the life of the people who dwelt in the hut circles, and tell us all that can be reasonably conjectured as to the heroes whose doubled-up skeletons or whose calcined ashes we find on Gunnerton or Simonside.

We thus come to the period of the Roman occupation, for which Dr. Bruce, recognising (as I have always heard him recognise) his obligations to Horsley and Hodgson, will be our undisputed authority. If I might venture to offer a contribution of my own, it would be a chapter on Roman camps and Roman armies, in which I would try to popularise the information contained on both subjects in the treatises of Hyginus and Vegetius. Some closer acquaintance with the works of these two authors would, I think, be found useful by future excavators of our Roman camps.

Of the Saxon period I must confess that I am too ignorant to be able to make any useful suggestion. The chapters on this subject in Hodgson Hinde's volume look like good work. If the Rev. G. F. Browne of Trinity College, Cambridge, or Mr. J. Romilly Allen, would undertake this part of the work, we should have confidence in its being satisfactorily performed.

I must make a similar confession of ignorance as to the period of the Norman and Plantagenet kings; but here, I think, we ought at once to utilise, if we may, the special knowledge of the castles of Northumberland, which, as we all know, has been acquired by our member, Mr. Cadwallader J. Bates. To a considerable extent, it may be said, the history of Northumberland from the eleventh to the

fifteenth century is the history of its castles, and a careful summary of these, compared with one another, and traced through their various fortunes from glory to decay, will save a good deal of repetition when we come to the parochial history in the second part.

Possibly it might be found wise to deal in a similar manner with the churches of Northumberland, if one of our northern ecclesiologists would give us a paper on the church architecture of the county, illustrating his conclusions by copious examples and the free use of photographs.

We shall want a short bright chapter on the Border forays between Northumberland and the two Scottish counties of Berwick and Roxburgh. Sir Walter Scott has accustomed us to look at these centuries of fray from the Scottish point of view. Let some one versed in the ballad literature of our county show us how they looked from the point of view not of Scotts and Kerrs but of Forsters and Fenwicks. The chapter devoted to this period need not be historically exhaustive, but must be beyond everything vivid and interesting, with something of the Homeric stir and movement—something of the Teutonic '*gaudia certaminis*' in its pages.

Mr. Woodman has a large collection of documents illustrating the legal history of the Northumbrian border, which some years ago were carefully studied by Professor Creighton, who extracted from them an interesting article read before the Archaeological Institute at its Newcastle meeting. It might perhaps still be possible to induce the Professor to contribute a chapter on this subject.

Coming down to a later period I admit that great condensation will be necessary in order to keep the work in moderate compass; but I think that we must at least have one chapter on Northumberland and the Reformation, one on Northumberland and the Civil War, and one on the two Jacobite rebellions. Probably also it will be necessary to devote a short chapter to the painful subject of the so-called '*Popish recusants*.'

Lastly, some notice must be taken, however impossible it may be to go into details, of the history of coal-mining in Northumberland, and of the great industrial changes which have transformed large districts of the county during the last hundred years from desolate moorlands into hives of busy industry. In this connection the

remarkable personality of the Northumbrian pitman whose invention of the locomotive has changed the face of the world and altered the currents of human history must be at least alluded to.

My conviction is that this chapter may be most tersely written by some one of our great captains of industry, who is thoroughly acquainted with all the details of the subject, but who will confine himself to its general outlines. No one is so able to write a short book on a large subject as one who could fill a folio upon it. It is the man with recently-acquired second-hand information who cannot resist the temptation to tell all he knows.

Some self-restraint would have to be practised by all the contributors, but I do not see why all the subjects to which I have referred might not be adequately treated of in two octavo volumes of six or seven hundred pages each.

We will now then pass to the detailed local history which corresponds to the *second* part of Hodgson's work. Here, I am inclined to think, that we shall do well to follow Hodgson's example, and tell the story by *parishes*.

The township makes, it seems to me, too small a unit, and the union—a modern agglomeration, and one hallowed by no higher association than poor rates—too large a one. We shall have, moreover, the great advantage, in thus building on Hodgson's lines, of being able to use more of his material. At the same time I would venture to suggest that we need not, like Hodgson, group our parishes according to the ecclesiastical system into deaneries, but shall do better to follow the great natural divisions of the country, especially as indicated by the rivers.

How many volumes we must allot to this part of the work will be a question for careful consideration. Remembering that Hodgson in three quarto volumes (perhaps we should rather say in two and a half, deducting half a volume for Alston and the Roman Wall) has barely covered a third of the ground, I do not think we can hope to accomplish our work in less than six, and in that calculation I purposely take no account of Newcastle. In order to effect this compression we shall have to sacrifice some of the family history which is so minutely dwelt upon by Hodgson. In some instances results will have to be stated without explaining the processes by which they were arrived at, and

sometimes the purport of several paragraphs may have to be stated in a genealogical table. It may be hoped that in this way sufficient space may be obtained for the introduction of other matter which should not be absent from a county history, pieces of folk-lore, anecdotes illustrating the customs of the rural population, dialectic peculiarities, even, perhaps, some information on points of natural history. This kind of narrative of the social habits of the people has been admirably given by Mr. D. D. Dixon of Rothbury in some of his papers on Coquetdale. If he could only impart his gift of vivid character-painting to all our contributors, our county history, even in eight volumes, need not fear a scarcity of readers.

While deprecating a too minute enumeration of all the devolutions of landed property throughout the county I quite recognise that in many cases the history of the county will be best illustrated by the history of some of its representative families. Not only the great family of Percy, whose name is inseparably connected with that of the county as a whole, but others, such as the Greys, the Charltons, the Riddells, the Fenwicks, the Forsters, the Liddells, the Blacketts, the Trevellyans, and many more whose names will at once occur to the mind of the antiquary, should have their story told in its broad outlines—without attempting to trace minutely the devolution of every field in their estates—because in telling that story the history of the parishes in which they bore sway will virtually have been told.

As for the apportionment of the space to the different districts, that would be a matter for careful deliberation, but my own impression is that it would divide itself in some such fashion as this:—

1st vol.—The Valleys of the Tweed and Till, Holy Island and Bamborough.

2nd vol.—Coquetdale and Alnwick.

3rd vol.—The Wansbeck, Morpeth, and Blyth.

4th vol.—Redesdale, North Tynedale, and South Tynedale.

5th vol.—Tyneside (excluding Hexham and Newcastle).

6th vol.—Allendale, Hexham, and the Valley of the Derwent.

With Newcastle, I purposely do not concern myself. It would perhaps require two volumes; but it will be sure to take care of itself. If the rest of Northumberland can be provided for, Newcastle may be trusted to get its own history written, if for no other reason, because

the demand for such a book among the 150,000 inhabitants of our city would always be sufficient to justify a bookseller in undertaking its publication if the suitable historian were found.

For our fellow-labourers in the county portion of the work, we should have I think to be largely dependent on the county clergy, among whom there are already several earnest antiquaries. It will be understood that for the parishes already described by Hodgson, we shall use as much as possible his material, and that for the others we confine ourselves largely to his model.

At this early stage of the discussion I fear we cannot say much as to the price at which the book could be brought out. It seems to be the general opinion that the book should be in quarto form; and, perhaps, each volume might be divided into two parts in order to make the book of a handier size. I think, if there is anything like a satisfactory response to our appeal for subscriptions, we should be able to issue each of these parts at a guinea. But, of course, the larger the number of subscribers the better value we shall be able to give for the money subscribed.

I do not suppose that a county history produced in the way I have suggested will be perfect. There is sure to be some inequality between the different portions of it. With all the care that may be exercised there will doubtless be some inaccuracies—perhaps some discordant statements. But still I think we may in this way obtain a county history and a good one, though not the ideally perfect one. For the perfect county history which some of my friends sigh for, I fear that we may have to wait till about the year 2000, by which time the coal-measures may be exhausted, and all the descendants of the present inhabitants of Northumbria may be settled in Britain beyond the seas. I plead for a book which shall be of some use to men now living, which shall enable the clerk upon his bicycle-tour, the farmer living by the Roman Wall, or the peasant under the shadow of the old Border peel, to take an intelligent interest in the study of archaeology, and learning what has been already discussed, to observe more, both for himself and for us. And with the greatest respect for the advocates of further delay and of the previous accumulation of further stores of archaeological material, I venture to remind them of the old but true proverb, 'The best is the enemy of the good.'