

VII.—OBITUARY NOTICE OF RICHARD OLIVER  
HESLOP, M.A., F.S.A., V.P.

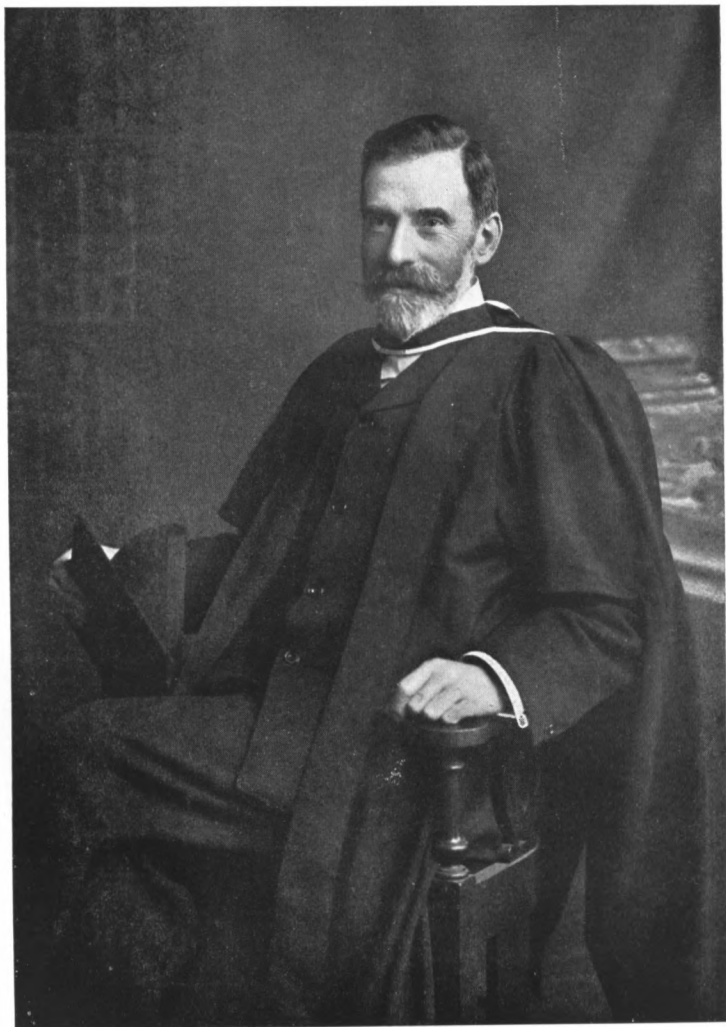
By RICHARD WELFORD, M.A., a vice-president of the Society.

[Read on the 29th March, 1916.]

In or about the year 1835, Joseph Heslop, formerly of Wide Open Dykes and the Mount, near Longtown, in the county of Cumberland, commenced business in the Cloth market, Newcastle, as a linen draper. He belonged to a family of fine old Cumberland 'statesmen'—a race of sturdy and independent farmers who owned the fee simple of their land and cultivated the soil themselves. To him and Elizabeth, his wife, a daughter of Captain Henry Brough Oliver of the 8th or King's Regiment, was born, on March 14th, 1842, a younger son, who received the name of Richard Oliver.

At the time of his birth a great wave of reform had but recently transformed the old town of Newcastle into something new and strange. Reform of parliament had extended the franchise to inhabitant householders like his father. Municipal reform had swept away the old governing body. Street reform had converted the narrow, smoke-covered thoroughfares into wide and spacious streets, flanked by lofty buildings of stone. The capital of Tyneside had become the seat of new life and enterprise.

In his boyhood young Heslop was sent to the local grammar school. The old Elizabethan building, with its fragrant memories of Eldon and Stowell, Akenside and Collingwood, and other notables, had succumbed to the march of improvement, and the building in which the boys now assembled was an ordinary house in Charlotte square. Under the headmastership of the Rev.



Faithfully yours,  
R. Oliver Teslop.



James Snape, the lad acquired the rudiments of knowledge, and became an apt pupil. His preparatory studies proved propitious to his future career, and he entered upon the strain and struggle of commercial life adequately equipped for its duties. He was ever a student, and his acquirements grew with his growth and strengthened with his strength.

In course of time he started in business on his own account as a merchant in iron, steel and allied metals. Punctual, methodical and painstaking, he made friends and kept them, and eventually extended his operations to other branches of metallic industry. He married, in 1867, Margaret Webster, daughter of Mr. Cuthbert Harrison of Newcastle, by whom he had a daughter and two sons. Thus established, he found time to cultivate a manifest bias towards local research and to cultivate some of the pleasures and refinements of literature.

In his younger days he had displayed much genuine humour in his productions, and that element more or less predominated during his after life. Those who care to study his dallyings with the comic muse, or regale themselves with 'quips and cranks and wanton wiles,' may consult Allan's *Tyneside Songs and Readings*, published in Newcastle in 1891. Therein they will find the best of his light and airy effusions enshrined.

But more serious matters soon invited his attention.

On the 8th October, 1887, he began in the columns of the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* a long series of articles on the folk-speech of Northumberland and Tyneside. His humorous papers had been written entirely in the dialect of the district, for no man knew so well as he the sinuosities and eccentricities of the language used by the common people. When the series was completed the English Dialect Society gathered them into two volumes, entitled *Northumberland Words: A Glossary of Words used in the County of Northumberland*, and issued them to the public with an elaborate preface and a supplementary volume

enumerating 400 local books in which the words were to be found. Thus was compiled a glossary which will probably never be superseded or repeated.

When a few years later, Dr. Joseph Wright, of Oxford, launched his great *English Dialect Dictionary* in five massive volumes, it was to our Tyneside lexicographer that he turned for assistance. Out of over 650 contributors who sent specimens from all parts of the kingdom. Mr. Heslop was one of five only to whom Dr. Wright expressed his special gratitude.

It was while collecting materials for his local glossary that, at the annual meeting in February, 1883, he was elected a member of our Society. Only a year earlier the Society had been re-organized and placed upon a more popular basis. As a result members were flocking in, eighty new men having joined in Mr. Heslop's first year alone. Towards the close of that period, he wrote his first paper in our *Archaeologia*. His subject was 'The Permian People of North Durham,' in which he endeavoured to show that the lines of geological formation in the district coincided with peculiarities of dialect. At our annual meeting in 1887 he was elected a member of the council, in 1890 one of the curators of the Blackgate museum, in 1899 one of the secretaries, and in 1907 a vice-president. In the work of building up the Society and strengthening its ways he laboured late and often. He wrote many of our annual reports, compiled in 1899 a *Handbook to the Black Gate*, and in 1906 a *Guide to the Castle, Black Gate and Heron Pit*, both of which went through more than one edition. The subjects upon which he discoursed or read papers and paragraphs at our monthly meetings will be found below. They undoubtedly range over a wide field of antiquarian research. Indeed it was a poor meeting in which Mr. Heslop had not something to expound or explain.

With a kindred institution—the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland—Mr. Heslop

also allied himself. It had been in existence about 23 years when he joined it in 1885. Six years later he attained to the office of one of the secretaries.

He also entered in 1899 the venerable Surtees Society, with its goodly output of 126 volumes. Here, too, he rose in six years to the office of vice-president. Learned societies in this district were never long in recognizing his merits and asking him to 'come up higher.'

Mr. Heslop was one of a local committee who re-organized the Northumbrian Pipe Music Society, the object being to preserve the melodies peculiar to the English border, to exhibit the pastime of sword dancing, and to illustrate other traditional accompaniments of folk-music. Of this Society he was the first president, and on the 29th of November, 1894, delivered his presidential address in this historic room in which we are now assembled. Shortly afterwards he became a fellow of the London Society of Antiquaries.

Among the lectures delivered to the members of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society in the spring of 1898, and afterwards published, were a series of nine relating to Northumbrian history, literature and art. Mr. Heslop was one of the lecturers, and chose for his subject that of which he was entirely master—'The Dialect Speech in Northumberland.'

In 1890, the Berwickshire Naturalists' Field Club called him, and he joined that society. But his engagements in commercial life, and the work that lay nearest his heart did not permit him to indulge very frequently in rambling among the historic scenes of the border.

About twenty-five to thirty years ago ardent Northumbrians were lamenting that the monumental work of the Rev. John Hodgson—his *History of Northumberland*—had never advanced beyond the stage at which the pen dropped from the gifted author's fingers. Various suggestions were made, but no pro-

gress was attained. At last came the hour and the man. Dr. Hodgkin in 1890 summoned local historians to his aid, the means were provided, and the project launched. Mr. Heslop was one of the invited. He threw himself into the business with characteristic energy. For not only did he contribute historical narrative to the work, but he read all the proofs, was rarely absent from committee meetings, kept the various books of account, and was the handy man of the respective editors. When it is remembered that twenty-five years have passed since that time, and that ten volumes in large quarto have been issued, the extent of such devoted labours in the midst of a busy commercial life may be estimated but cannot be described.

Apart from antiquities, which was his absorbing passion, Mr. Heslop had a competent knowledge of the fine arts, and numbered many artists among his friends. Especially did he honour those who helped to illustrate historic features of his native town, or picturesque scenes in its great river. Through this helpful cult he became, on its formation, one of the committee of the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle. At the same time his extensive knowledge of books procured for him the position of a co-opted member of the Newcastle Public Library, while his long labours on the committee of the Literary and Philosophical Society brought him, on the death of Sir Joseph Swan, the honour of the presidency of that venerable institution. He was also a co-opted governor of the Grammar School in which he had been educated.

The formation of the Newcastle Pen and Palette Club, at whose inaugural dinner in March, 1900, Dr. Hodgkin presided, naturally enlisted Mr. Heslop's active sympathies. At its ordinary meetings, and especially its 'Guest Nights,' when illustrious visitors, famous in literature and art, were entertained with 'the feast of reason and the flow of soul,' he played a conspicuous part. He also read to the members occasional papers,

brimful of humour, diluted with common sense, and eventually, in 1904, he was elected president of the Club.

In 1901 the University of Durham conferred upon him the honorary degree of Master of Arts, in the following year he was appointed a magistrate of the borough of Newcastle and one of the licensing committee, while in 1908 the queen of the Netherlands bestowed upon him the office of Dutch consul in Newcastle.

On the 3rd March, 1916, within eleven days of his 74th birthday, he passed away, and we saw him no more.

Amid all the public and private work imposed upon him by the important organizations enumerated in the foregoing narrative, one feature of Mr. Heslop's character shone out at all times and places, and that was his desire to be doing something for the benefit of others. How many parties of peripatetic visitors to Newcastle he conducted over the old town, the Castle, the Blackgate and kindred survivals of the past; how many programmes and special guide-books, and personally conducted tours he prepared for conferences, deputations, anniversaries and the like, are past finding out. Men from somewhere who want to see everything are never long absent, and Mr. Heslop had more than his share. Yet, though his services to strangers were constantly in demand, they were at all times cheerfully rendered.

In matters of debate he was one of the most tolerant of men. With great independence of character he united perfect charity. He associated with all sorts and conditions of people who could assist his researches into local history, antiquities, dialect and song. But a spirit of love and peace seemed to pervade his actions everywhere. Amid all the controversies of his time he held his own firmly but courteously. The liberty he claimed for himself he generously extended to others. Even in his conversation there was ever a mixture of suavity and deference, blended with good humour.

It was said of Gambetta, in the height of his power, that 'he devoured France with activity.' Mr. Heslop was our Gambetta.



He spurred us on to attempt greater things, was always in the forefront of our movements, and was generally fortunate in conducting, or helping to conduct them, to a happy issue.

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