



JOHN GEORGE HODGSON.

III.—A MEMOIR OF JOHN GEORGE HODGSON, A VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

BY JOHN OXBERRY.

[Read on 29th September, 1926.]

Those of us who were personally acquainted with our late vice-president, John George Hodgson, and who were privileged to spend an occasional hour with him in his room at the Northern Counties Club, are aware of the interest he took in antiquarian and archæological pursuits, and must have met with frequent examples of his attachment to our Society, and of the attention he paid to whatever was likely to affect its well-being. Our publications were regularly read and preserved by him, and little appeared in the newspapers, relating to the Society, that escaped his notice. He seldom came to our meetings, never contributed a paper to our transactions, and was known only by name to many of our members. Though he was not often with us he was always a friend to the Society; this was specially manifested by the help he gave to one of the most important off-shoots of our Society, the Northumberland County History Committee. His death has furnished further proof of his sympathy with our aims, and has given him an additional title to our remembrance through the valuable bequest of books and manuscripts¹ he has made to our library.

It was as a member of the Northumberland County History Committee that Mr. Hodgson was able most effectively to aid in the furtherance of local historical

¹ For a list of these see *Proc.*, 4th ser., II, 207.

research. When Dr. Hodgkin, at a meeting of our Society held thirty-six years ago, advocated the continuance of the great task begun by the Rev. John Hodgson, he alluded to the large quantity of material that the historian had accumulated for the work, before ill health had compelled him to lay down his pen. This collection was still intact, and he was glad to be able to announce that the historian's descendant, Mr. J. G. Hodgson, had generously offered to allow full use to be made of it, if the Society decided to proceed with the undertaking. As we all know now, Dr. Hodgkin's idea was adopted. The formation of the Northumberland County History Committee followed, with Mr. J. G. Hodgson as one of its first members. The historical material, which the zeal of his grandfather enabled him to place in the hands of the Committee, was an important contribution towards the successful launching of the scheme. It provided a base to build upon, and greatly reduced the preliminary spade work necessary to the initiation of a task of such magnitude. As long as health permitted, Mr. Hodgson was usually to be found at the meetings of this Committee, and the clause inserted in his will, providing for the use by the Committee of the collection of books and documents gathered together by his grandfather, testifies that long after he had ceased to be able to attend its meetings he still retained an interest in its proceedings and continued to be moved by the same desire to advance the work as had influenced him thirty-six years previously when Dr. Hodgkin's suggestion was first laid before the Society.

Mr. Hodgson was born in Eldon Street, now known as Eldon Place, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, in November, 1841. His father, Richard Wellington Hodgson, filled an important place in the commercial and public life of Tyneside. He was a member of our Society, and a memoir and portrait of him are to be found in the Centenary volume of our transactions. We all recognize Mr. Hodgson's paternal grandfather, the Rev. John Hodgson, as one of the most capable of the many

able men the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne can claim to have numbered on its roll of membership. Of him, also, a memoir and portrait are included in our Centenary volume. George Straker, Mr. Hodgson's maternal grandfather, was likewise a man of note in his day. He played many parts, first that of master-mariner, then among others those of shipowner, shipbuilder, and town councillor. Only a passing allusion to him is permissible here, but more may be learned of his sturdy, impulsive character, his straightforwardness and his courage from the sympathetic biography of him which Mr. Welford wrote for *Men of Mark*.

When Mr. Hodgson had completed the preparatory stages of his school training in the North, he was placed in a private school, kept by a clergyman, at Richmond, Yorkshire. This establishment fell far short of the expectations formed of it by Mr. Hodgson's parents, and in 1856 he was sent farther south to Tonbridge School, where he remained for two years. The second master of the school at the time he attended it was the Rev. Edward Ind. Weldon, father of the present dean of Durham, Bishop Weldon. Intended, like his father, for a commercial career, Mr. Hodgson left school to enter the office of a shipbroker at Antwerp. He remained there about eighteen months, and then further to enlarge his training and experience, and to extend his familiarity with the French language, he was sent into a merchant's office at Marseilles, where he stayed for twelve months. With this preliminary training in commercial knowledge and in languages, he returned home in the autumn of 1861, and as a youth bordering on twenty years of age, entered his father's office at Newcastle. His father was a stone merchant, and young Hodgson commenced then and there the work of conducting a business—the manufacture and sale of grindstones—which was destined to be his work for nearly sixty-four years. This business had been started in 1784 by his great-grandfather, Richard Kell, of Heworth Shore, and, until the Great War came to reduce its foreign trade, it had done more, perhaps,

than any other single Tyneside firm of its time, to extend and maintain in the far corners of the earth the name and reputation of Newcastle grindstones. Of his own and his family's connection with an industry that had been for centuries specially identified with the name of Newcastle, Mr. Hodgson, as a Newcastle man, was not a little proud, and his one acknowledged excursion into local literature was a brief historical account of the grindstone trade on Tyneside, which will be found under his name in the handbook issued by the local committee when the British Association visited Newcastle in 1916.

Mr. Hodgson was a lover of sport, and was well acquainted with its literature; in his early manhood he hunted regularly, was fond of horse-racing, and for a time figured as an owner and runner of racehorses. In Northumberland and Durham and North Yorkshire he was widely known; throughout this area in not a few castles and in many a family mansion, as well as in many a humbler home he was esteemed as a friend and welcomed as a guest. Whether he was in the company of a duke—and the late duke of Northumberland and he were close companions and friends—or of one of his own workmen he was the same considerate, genial and courteous gentleman, not incapable of using vigorous language if the occasion required it, but preferring, when it was attainable without the sacrifice of principle, to reach his goal by smooth and pleasant pathways rather than by a rough and stormy road.

At the Northern Counties Club, of which he had been a member for fifty-eight years, and where he had resided, at the time of his death, for over thirty-two years, he was highly esteemed by his fellow-members. For a long period he acted as chairman of the management committee, and assiduously watched over the social and financial welfare of the Club. To mark their appreciation of his services, and as a testimony of their admiration for the many pleasing qualities that distinguished him, the members at a complimentary dinner held in December, 1913, presented him with his portrait, painted in oils by

the well-known London artist, Mr. Oswald Birley. Lord Durham presided at the dinner and made the presentation on behalf of the subscribers, and the representative character of the company assembled in honour of Mr. Hodgson will be appreciated when it is said that it included such well-known north-country names as Liddell, Ridley, Clayton, Straker, Palmer, Noble, Bewicke, and others. Mr. Hodgson in his response, after thanking the subscribers asked the Club to accept the portrait. It hangs there to-day on the wall of the dining-room, immediately behind the chair he always occupied at the head of the table, and serves as a memorial of his work for the Club, and of his association with it for so prolonged a period.

Mr. Hodgson was elected a member of our Society in 1884, and in 1917 was appointed one of our vice-presidents. He was also a member from 1885, and a vice-president from 1897, of the Surtees Society, a member for many years of the Durham and Northumberland Architectural and Archæological Society, and, from 1906, of the Yorkshire Archæological Society. He was loyal to the interests of the societies with which he was connected, and was always glad when he was able to strengthen the membership roll of any of them by persuading a friend to join.

He was a justice of the peace for the county of Durham for between thirty and forty years, and until the infirmities of age prevented him, was regular in his attendance on the county bench at Gateshead. He was also for many years one of the magistrates' representatives on the Standing Joint Committee of the Durham county council, and a member of the Durham prison visiting committee. He took a great deal of interest in the Durham Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, also, and seldom missed its meetings at Durham. The same may be said of his connection with the Charity Organization Society of Newcastle, and of another institution with which he was closely associated for many years; the Netherton Training School for boys. He was a member of the Management Committee of this

school from 1907 until 1925, when he was made a vice-president, and, the Secretary of the school says, took a special interest in the after-care of the boys, and in their sport. He entertained a strong liking for this institution, and worked for it all the more readily because he recognized it as one whose predominating aim was to train the individual that came under its care how best to help himself. It taught a boy to stand on his own legs and depend upon the support of others no longer than was absolutely necessary. Unless this aim were kept in view Mr. Hodgson held that the expenditure of public money, or the bestowal of private charity, except in cases of actual physical disability, was never justifiable. He was not a public man in the ordinarily accepted sense of that term, but in his later years he gave a great deal of thought to social questions, and although it is outside the scope of our present purpose to deal with his ideas on such subjects, this, at least, may be said; he took all his public duties seriously, he attended to them with regularity and care, and, within the limits of his powers and his opportunities, he acted up to the belief that any man in his station in society who shirked the responsibilities that belonged to it, was untrue to the best traditions of English public life, and was unfaithful to the claims of an enlightened patriotism.

In social intercourse Mr. Hodgson was a delightful companion. He was an entertaining conversationalist, and as a steady reader of books both of a light and of an instructive character, his talk was capable of ranging over a wide variety of subjects. He had a large fund of anecdotes to draw upon, and not only told a good story himself, but enjoyed the good stories of others. He was a master of the local dialect and revelled in stories that illustrated the shrewdness and humour of the Tyneside workman, and told them as only a native can.

His relations with his own workmen were frank, cordial and sympathetic. He and they had occasional quarrels, and fought themselves kind again. Several of them showed their respect for his memory by attending his

funeral. One of those who came had worked for, and known Mr. Hodgson as an employer, for nearly sixty years, and belonged to a family of grindstone quarrymen that for three generations, a period extending backwards over more than a hundred years, had given their services as workmen to the firm of Richard Kell and Company, of which Mr. Hodgson was the head, after his father's death. If this be regarded as a tribute to the steady and faithful services that working men are capable of giving to an employer, it affords equally striking evidence that employers are not always what it has recently become a popular pastime on some party platforms to label them.

I have spoken of Mr. Hodgson's geniality, his consideration for others, and his courtesy. Another characteristic that tended to endear him to all who knew him was his tact. Of his possession of this quality his old friend and fellow vice-president, Mr. J. Crawford Hodgson, furnishes us with an illustration that is worth quoting here. In the early days of the Northumberland County History Committee, a serious misunderstanding arose, and in consequence of a mistake—afterwards cleared up—the late Mr. Cadwallader J. Bates took very great offence. The tactfulness of Mr. J. G. Hodgson was requisitioned by his fellow-members to heal the breach, and so admirably did he perform the duty allotted to him that Mr. Bates subsequently confided to Mr. Crawford Hodgson that "Mr. John George Hodgson's sincerity is as great as his tact, and his tact is boundless." With this testimony we conclude, it was a tribute of value, for it came from a colleague who had worked with him and had known him long and intimately.

Mr. Hodgson died where he had made his home, at the Northern Counties Club, in Eldon Square, Newcastle, on the 9th of July, 1926, at the ripe age of eighty-five. He was buried four days later in Jesmond Old Cemetery, and though he had outlived most of his old friends, the large body of mourners that gathered round his grave showed that he had not outlived the esteem of his contemporaries.