

## XVI.—REVIEWS.

*The Three Northern Counties of England.* Edited by Sir Cuthbert Headlam, with an introduction by the Right Hon. Lord Eustace Percy. pp. xii + 343. Northumberland Press Limited, 1939.

### Chapters I, III, IV, V.

Special Commissions are far removed from the Anglo-Saxons and yet further from the bronze age, but if the present needs of the north country can be better served by projecting into the remote past a unity of recent formation, the critical historian perhaps does best to make only the most gentle of protests. The difficulty has been overcome with varying success by the contributors to this book which is sponsored by northern Conservatives. The editor has been careless of chronology in arranging the material which forms the first five chapters, so that after two concerned mainly with Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians and a third on folklore, the reader is abruptly carried back to the prehistoric period whence he proceeds with more leisure to Roman times. Since, however, the book does not offer a connected history, but rather a series of essays on a number of isolated topics which have nothing but geographical background in common, the objection is less serious than it might have been. Mr. W. P. Hedley's brief chapter on the prehistoric period is disappointing. Had his rough outline of the main phases of prehistory been supplemented by some reference to the present state of prehistoric studies in the north and especially to work done for recent

volumes of the *Northumberland County History*, his contribution would have been of some value to the specialist as well as stimulating to the layman. There is a beautiful photograph of the stone circle near Keswick, but one hopes that Mr. Hedley was not responsible for prolonging the fiction that it had anything to do with druids. Many who read this book will have seen Mr. Richmond directing excavations or enjoyed his expert guidance on Roman sites, and if this has led them to expect a high standard in his chapter on "Ancient Rome and Northern England" they will not be disappointed. His task was in some ways easier, partly because in his period the area included did come near to forming a unit and partly because of the recent solution of many difficult problems affecting the Romano-British period in the north, but in this he is no more than reaping the reward of his own labours. A comment on the misprint in the fourth line on p. 74 is perhaps the last resort of the reviewer searching for criticism in an essay which everyone can read with pleasure and profit. Two of Mr. Paul Brown's drawings add to the merit of an excellent chapter.

The first chapter in the book is devoted to an account of the various racial elements which form the present population of the three northern counties and more especially the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian elements. The evidence of history, archæology and, to a lesser extent, of place-names has been combined to form an introduction to early northern history which is adequate in its main outlines, but which in detail contains much that is questionable. In suggesting that the campaigns of Agricola and Lollius Urbicus mark the beginning of Border warfare, the writer has forgotten that after c. 383 there was no Border for nearly seven hundred years. The battle of Nechtansmere in 685 is commonly taken to mark the beginning of the end in Northumbria, but such a view overlooks many important points—that Bede was probably still learning his alphabet in 685, that the Lindisfarne Gospels were still unwritten and

that the famous school at York was not yet established. In other words, the achievements which brought Northumbria to the forefront of European civilization were still in the future and it cannot be admitted that the "finest flowering" (p. 7) of culture and learning was already past in 685. These lapses are remarkable in one who seems to be well acquainted with his material.

A wealth of material, together with a bibliography, on north country custom, superstition and legend has been collected by Miss H. H. Harrison in an interesting and enjoyable chapter on Folklore. In addition to much other material the chapter contains the text of a Guiser's play as it was played in the Team valley in 1860 and a variant of the same theme from Cumberland. The present writer is not competent to criticize on these matters but he will always prefer to believe that a cat with its back to the fire is a sign of snow rather than of rain.

PETER HUNTER BLAIR

#### Chapters II, VI-XIII.

Something of certain portions of this composite volume is being said by another writer who is specially competent to deal with them, and it is obviously impossible for one mind to comprehend all the subjects which it touches and the treatment of which for the most part has been entrusted to persons with excellent qualifications for the task. The thirteen chapters of which it consists are as a rule brief and concise, like the editor's historical summary of the progress of the last three centuries in the north, which, although supplemented by abundant footnotes, is compressed into eighteen pages. The only exception to this rule is the chapter, by Professor Heslop Harrison and Mr. George Temperley, on the Flora of the three counties, which is considerably lengthened by the inclusion of a detailed list of plants. This, however, is a piece of work which, so far as the present writer is able to judge, should add to the

value of the work as a source of reference. A separate appendix of more than fifty pages contains notes upon historic buildings which are additional to Mr. Honeyman's general account of the architecture of the large district under survey.

Nearly twenty years ago, the study of place-names in Northumberland and Durham was set upon a sound scientific footing by Sir Allen Mawer, then Professor of English at Newcastle. Since then those interested in this form of study have had plenty of leisure to observe that its end is not yet and that a vast variety of opinion can be entertained by philologists on the source and meaning of such names whose very simplicity may be deceptive. A comparison of the limited number of place-names selected for discussion by Dr. Hull with the entries relating to them in Mawer's volume and in Ekwall's *Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* affords convincing proof of this. We have looked through the Durham section of Dr. Hull's article. Only in such unmistakable names as Barnard Castle is unanimity to be found between the three authors. There are several instances of approaches to the same or similar conclusions through somewhat different avenues. But there are also cases in which the three opinions are irreconcilable. Thus, while Dr. Hull sees in the first element in Medomsley the Old English *mathmas* (horses), Ekwall explains it as *medumest* (middlemost), and Mawer refers it to the personal name Mæthelon. While Mawer is wisely content to leave the first element in Pelaw and Pelton unsolved, Ekwall discovers in it the name of one Peola, and Dr. Hull interprets it as a fence or paling; and, further, while in the second element Dr. Hull sees the Old English *hoh* and Ekwall sees *hlaw*, Mawer anticipates this divergence of view by suggesting a confusion between the two words. We are certain, however, that in his explanation of the name Finchale Dr. Hull is very much nearer the truth than either Mawer or Ekwall. It is possible that his study of place-names has not extended to surnames: other-

wise, he would have observed that the author of a work on the place-names of Cumberland and Westmorland was called, not Sedgwick, but Sedgefield.

There is a long gap between the Roman occupation and 1603 which might have been filled by some such historical summary as has been given of the later period. Medieval history, however, is represented to some extent by Mr. Honeyman's chapter on Ecclesiastical and Military Architecture. This takes us well into modern times, and what Mr. Honeyman has to say of post-medieval architecture, both ecclesiastical and domestic, is a welcome feature of such a survey and is written from a store of knowledge gathered with keen observation. His general remarks on the castles of the north set forth the development of fortresses well and clearly, and his accounts of individual castles at the end of the volume note their chief features with precision. His style, moreover, has a flavour of its own which gives interest to what otherwise might be dry inventories. His notes on churches are also consistently interesting. As regards his general account of ecclesiastical architecture, it is founded, as he points out, "upon an examination of architectural rather than documentary evidence." Architectural history, however, can hardly be written satisfactorily without some recourse to written documents as distinct from the documentary evidence which fabrics themselves supply. We are bound to confess that Mr. Honeyman's description of the greatest architectural monument of the north of England does not satisfy us at all—not even architecturally, for, while he rightly notices the priority, which is now generally regarded as proved on the evidence of written documents, of the original choir vaulting at Durham to that of similar vaulting in other European churches, to style it "ribbed groined" vaulting is wrong. A ribbed cross-vault is one in which ribs take the place of the groins formed by the earlier form of cross-vault, and it is in this supersession of the groined vault that the priority of the Durham vaults consists. And, although

Mr. Honeyman has elsewhere resorted to the somewhat slender evidence of written documents to give Elias of Dereham, one of the best-known of medieval building officials, the credit of being the architect of the thirteenth-century work at the east end of the cathedral, his conjecture is not sufficiently capable of proof to make any part of the statement that Bishop Poore "sent for Elias Dereham, who had been his architect at Salisbury," admissible as a matter of fact. No one who is acquainted with the details of medieval building organization can read such an addition to history without surprise; and possibly even more surprising is the statement, supported by no evidence at all, that the thirteenth-century transepts and crossing at Houghton-le-Spring "seem to have been designed by Elias Dereham, the architect of Salisbury Cathedral, when he was visiting his friend Bishop Richard Poore in Durham." We hasten to add that, when he arrives at a later period, Mr. Honeyman treads on firmer ground; but, so long as historians of churches repeat the loose statements that Bishop So-and-so did this and Prior This-or-that did that, and cheerfully confound the clerical benefactor and administrator with the lay artist and craftsman, so long will the eminently practical character of the medieval mind be obscured by romantic superstitions of modern growth.

It is perhaps unfortunate that a work which is presented on the book-jacket as an authoritative survey should be anything but a record of proved fact and become a field for the display of theories which are more ingenuous than ingenious. Such theories, however, so far as we can judge, are rare in this volume, and the general quality of the chapters is soberly narrative. Misprints are few, and it would hardly be worth while to call attention to the allusions to the *Victoria History of the County of Durham* as "Victorian" in the editor's footnotes, were they not so frequent. Professor Hickling's chapter on Geology is illustrated by an excellent map, and, of other maps and plans, the end-papers are clear and attractive guides to the

distribution of industries and the site of antiquities throughout the three counties. In view, however, of the re-binding, which is the inevitable fate of useful works of reference, the use of maps as end-papers firmly pasted to the covers of the book is a doubtful expedient. The plates, though not numerous, have been selected with care; but we wish that a picture of Warkworth castle, perhaps the most interesting and instructive of northern strongholds and not the least remarkable in beauty of site, had been added to them, and, as some space is rightly devoted to the discussion of cross-shafts, photographs of the Bewcastle and Gosforth crosses, each in its own way a monument of first-class interest, would not have been out of place. A brief preface by Lord Eustace Percy comes with double force from a member of a great northern family and a leading official of the University which meets the needs of higher education in the northern counties. Finally, the Northumberland Press deserve great credit for the production of a book which in paper, type and illustration falls behind no work of similar design and purpose issued during recent years.

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