

## VII.—REVIEWS.

- 1.—*The Province of Mar*, being the Rhind Lectures in Archæology, 1941, by W. Douglas Simpson, M.A., D.Litt., F.S.A., F.S.A.Scot. 7¼ in. by 9⅝ in., xi + 167 pp., illus., maps. Aberdeen, the University Press, MCMXLIV.

From very early times, Caledonia was divided into four principal regions, represented in early medieval history by the kingdoms of Dalriada, Cumbria or Strathclyde, Lothian, and Pictland. The people of these regions differed, and to a considerable extent still differ from each other in race, religion, architecture and ideology, and their differences add greatly to the interest of Scottish history in all its aspects. Pictland was by no means the least interesting of the regions, and the Province of Mar, which "comprised the district between the rivers Dee and Don, with the upper and middle basins of both these streams," is to Dr. Simpson, as an Aberdonian, the most interesting of the Pictish provinces, and certainly it has provided ample material for him to work upon, though, particularly in dealing with the prehistoric period, he does not always confine himself strictly to its limits.

Starting with a brief topographical description, Dr. Simpson deals in succession with the cultural and political history of Mar from Mesolithic times down to the conversion of the Celtic province into an Anglo-Norman earldom whose tragic later history he outlines to final disaster in the '15.

Throughout this long story of chances and changes Dr. Simpson's enthusiasm never flags and his readers' attention is constantly held. As has been said of another writer, he

"can make a description of a stone wall sound quite exciting," and he does not sacrifice scientific accuracy to picturesqueness or even to patriotism. Nearly every page has an illustration, aptly chosen and well reproduced; there are ample maps and plans, and the format of the volume is a credit to everybody concerned in its production.

As an annex to the main body of the work Dr. Simpson has added a 'valuable "short account" of Kildrummy Castle, illustrated with a folding plan and some magnificent photographs which justify his admiration for this "noblest of northern castles."

H.L.H.

2.—*The History of Northumberland and Durham, from the earliest times to 1714*, parts I and II, by the Rev. Chancellor Harrison, M.A., F.S.A., 8vo., pp. i-ii, 1-30, i, 1-30. London, John Murray. Undated. Price 2s. 6d.

The task of writing in sixty octavo pages a succinct illustrated history of two counties as rich in ancient remains as Northumberland and Durham is neither enviable nor light. It demands concentration, unity and great accuracy in writing, combined with exceptionally careful choice in illustrations. These requirements are difficult to find in the work before us. An allocation of fifteen pages to the period from the palaeolithic to 1060, fifteen to the years 1060-1485, and thirty to the years 1485-1714, suggests over-concentration at first and too great a diffusion later. And so it is: we have detailed descriptions of the visits of James I and Charles I, but no reference to the visits of Hadrian, Severus or Constantinus, who were infinitely more important figures. Much on the Commonwealth and little on the baronage. There is little unity of theme, though the district lends itself particularly to treatment as a unit from the Mesolithic

period onwards. The accuracy of the work is highly uneven and the treatment often shaky until the book is half-way through, at a point where the interest of an antiquarian in it lessens.

These observations may be illustrated by citing some examples of the shortcomings in the work, which seem largely due to imperfect personal acquaintance with the material discussed or to failure to read any recent literature (for example, *Archæologia Aeliana*, *Antiquity*, or the works of Collingwood and Myres, or Stenton) which would have kept the book up to date. Thus, in the prehistoric period, Chancellor Harrison knows nothing of the Mesolithic cultures discovered by Buckley and others, and his whole treatment of the subject reveals an uneasiness based upon nodding acquaintance. Men do not "extract bronze from ores": bronze is, after all, an alloy. And "fragments of a piece of pottery" have an odd ring, whether the oddity is due to bad proof-reading or bad thinking. Much more is known of megalithic monuments and of long barrows than the meagre treatment would suggest. Iron-Age remains are certainly scarce in county Durham, but they are not scarce in Northumberland; and the reasons for this and for the shift in man's distribution as between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age are full of interesting implications, of which the text gives no hint. Fortified Iron-Age sites (e.g. Yevering Bell or Warden Law) are certainly numerous enough to warrant mention, while the village sites cannot be left out of the picture. The fact that Hamsterley should be "singled out" for mention displays real ignorance both of the site itself and the subject at issue. Finally, the Scot's Dyke, oddly described in one and the same paragraph as a "road" and as "only a dyke or ditch," is neither continuous nor certainly of the age to which Chancellor Harrison so confidently assigns it: and why does it appear with Hadrian's Wall on the Roman map?

The Roman period receives somewhat less short shrift, though the composition suggests an account brought up to

date by the lazy method of adding snippets rather than writing afresh in the light of new information. But, alas! the newer information is not there and the older leaves much to be desired. An examination of the map and the text together reveals some unhappy inaccuracies. Dere Street, a name never used throughout the book, does not pass through Ridsdale or over Carter Bar. There is no direct road from Durham to South Shields, and the known road, the Wrekendyke, is not marked. Nor was there any Roman road crossing the Tees at Yarm. Chesterholm, Chester-le-Street, Risingham and Chew Green do not appear in the map. As for the actual roads, there is no reason to think that the Devil's Causeway was unfinished. The "rough foundation," where best preserved, carries a good gravelled upper surface, and the statement that the road is not raised above the surrounding country is in many places not true. Milestones also might have been mentioned, since both counties have produced them, in place of the misleading statement on civilian transport, as if this was at everyone's disposal. The Walbottle hoard has nothing to do with a road-stage.

The historical account of the Roman period is ill-arranged, and not merely slight but nugatory, while the account of the Wall and Vallum is vitiated by being out of date since 1936. The Vallum is now proved not to precede the Wall, and the fact was widely published by Collingwood. The visitor will be deceived in his hope of seeing "a complete plan of a typical Roman fort" at Housesteads, where only the central buildings and the defences are now exposed, but the Wall and turret at Denton Burn and the Vallum crossing at Benwell should be mentioned as visible. Apart from the Wall, the Roman origin of the bishopric of York deserves mention, while Roman lead-mining is known for the Alston district, but is not well proved either for Weardale or Teesdale, though statements to the contrary are often made.

When the Roman province collapsed, there is no

evidence for Pictish penetration as far as the Humber: on the contrary, there is evidence for a strong sub-Roman organization in Yorkshire. The account of the Northumbrian kingdom gives little hint of the early struggles of Bernicia and inexplicably stops short just before the period of Aethelfrith's great achievements. The story of Cuthbert's remains is so emphasized, that a description of the relics, just to say what they are, would have been welcome. But the silence on this subject extends to many of the material remains of the period, even in the section purporting to describe them. The sole qualification "handsome" as applied to the Lindisfarne Gospels, surely a fit subject for illustration, is positively jejune. We should have welcomed a mention of the Codex Amiatinus and the localities of some of the best monumental crosses. In dealing with architectural remains it is incorrect to say that no traces of Bede's monastery now exist and to omit Wilfrid's splendid crypt at Hexham, while the account of Monkwearmouth is deficient in understanding of the remains. Seaham and Heddon might have been added to the Saxon churches, and what of the early church at Corbridge, with its interesting Irish connexions, and the later revival represented by the towers at Ovingham, Bywell and Whittingham?

The view of the Norman period is contained in the opening sentences: "Normans, Castles and Scots; these three are intimately connected. The Normans built the castles and the Scots attacked them." After this breezy reminiscence of "*1066 and all that*," it is not surprising to find that no attention is paid to the significant evidence for systematic social development provided by church-building all over the two counties or by the foundation of the feudal lordships great and small between the days of the black wasting of the North (which had nothing to do with the death of Bishop Walcher) and the Wars of Independence. And the same failure to see war and peace in perspective obscures the significance of the abbey foundations, or re-foundations, after the feudal lordships prospered, as at

Newminster, Brinkburn, Blanchland, Finchale, Tynemouth and Lindisfarne. A shakiness in generalities extends widely through the section. The Regality of Hexham (placed north of the Tyne) is compared with the Palatinate as a rival to the royal power, and the priory nave, ruined in 1296, is described as in use in 1537. The extent of the walls of Newcastle is not smaller than that of Chester, Chichester or Chepstow. There is no mention of Harbottle Castle or the organization of the March. While, in describing the rise of industry, glass (p. 25) is treated as if continuously made in Anglian England after Benedict Biscop's time, and shipbuilding (p. 27) as if confined to the Wear, with no mention of the great Newcastle warships of medieval days and the source of their timbers, the royal forest of Chopwell. Nor is the Newcastle mint anywhere mentioned among the distinctions of the city. Among crenellated dwellings, Aydon, near Corbridge, deserves particular mention.

It is outside the scope of an antiquary to consider in detail the later period, and it is clear that, in this second part of the book, the author is more at home with his subject. The work continues less breathlessly and the reader also has fewer occasions in which to gasp. But it remains a one-sided production, and no space is devoted to the agricultural developments which followed the union of the kingdoms and other consequences of peace on the Border.

It is no pleasure to write this kind of review, especially when the book in question has been prepared by one who ought to know better than to wish such ill-digested material upon the school-children for whom it is meant. In these days, when the old order is rapidly changing into something new, eager claims are made for and by the older state of society on the ground that it has certain gifts of mind which we consider a valuable heritage, worthy of transmission to the new age and of preservation by it. When cases appear which obscure or belie the truth of this claim, they narrow the basis of the claim and make us look the more zealously

to the laurels that are left. What happens to those by whom the offence comes is not a matter for consideration here. The *Water Babies* or *Hypatia* deal with the point in many aspects.

I.A.R.