



SPEN VALLEY: PAST AND PRESENT.

BY

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IN SPEN VALLEY," &C., &C.

ILLUSTRATED.

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For several years I have been importuned to write a History of Spen Valley, and have at last yielded, but not without some misgivings. My time is so fully occupied with other matters that I have always been afraid I could not do justice to the theme, and should have greatly preferred to have handed the papers in my possession—the collections of many years—to some one who had more leisure for the work.

Another obstacle that deterred me was that I could not, from the documents I had, trace plainly the genealogy of one of the ancient families who once owned the greater portion of the central township. This obstacle has, however, been overcome by the fortunate discovery of a number of papers which seem to have been buried in the Bodleian Library for several centuries. These have enabled me to trace the manorial descent very clearly, and to follow the family in question through all its wide ramifications. The papers discovered seem to have been collected in Queen Elizabeth's reign by Mr. John Hanson, of Rastrick, who has a good reputation as an antiquary. They possess however, no continuity, but are chiefly a series of disjointed notes and memoranda referring to an estate in Liversedge, which had descended to an heiress of the Rayners whom Mr. Hanson had made his wife. They are, in fact, the papers which he seems to have used in prosecuting a long law suit undertaken to establish his wife's claim. Had Mr. Hanson supplemented the documents with some information he was well qualified to give respecting the men and the times in which he lived he would greatly have enhanced their value. Moving as he did among the chief actors in that great tragedy "The Rising of the North," he could have furnished some interesting information respecting the part taken by Sir John Neville in a movement which proved so disastrous to the fortunes of that gallant soldier.

It has been thought by some that such places as the manufacturing towns of the West-Riding, being chiefly of mushroom growth, have really very little ancient history, but I hope this volume will demonstrate that such is by no means the case, as regards at least one of the three townships which constitute Spen Valley. My difficulty, in fact, has been in keeping that portion of the volume within moderate compass. The Luddite Risings I have dealt with pretty fully so far as the Spen Valley developments are concerned ; but that singular movement had its ramifications in several neighbouring towns, and I must refer those who would like to read the full history to my published book on the subject, if a copy can now be obtained.

I have thankfully to acknowledge many useful hints and helps from brother antiquarians, and especially my great indebtedness to Mr. J. J. Stead, who has aided me in many ways. Most of the illustrations in the book are from views furnished by him. To Mr. Wm. Andrews, F.R.H.S., author of "Bygone Yorkshire," I am indebted for the blocks of the "Cucking Stool" and the "Village Stocks;" to Dr. Stuart for the views of "Liversedge Church" and "Healds Hall;" and to the Spen Valley Printing Co. for the capital block of "St. Luke's." My thanks are also due to Mr. George Siddall, of Cleckheaton, for allowing me to inspect the file of the *Cleckheaton Advertiser*. To these and other friends and well wishers I beg to tender my grateful acknowledgments.

F. P.

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CHAPTER I.

LIGHT FROM AFAR.

Spen Valley: its limits—Early History of Yorkshire and the District—The Britons—The Romans—The Saxons and the Danes—The Spen and its tributaries—Hustings Knowle—Open-air Courts—The Open Fields System—The Conqueror's desolating march—Extracts from Domesday Book.



THE district called Spen Valley, which comprises within its limits the rising towns of Cleckheaton, Liversedge, and Heckmondwike, has only come to be known by that name within the recollection of the present generation. Thomas Wright, who lived in the valley during the best years of his life, and who has left behind him an interesting autobiography, calls the little stream which runs through it "the River Spen," and this probably suggested to local antiquarians the name Spen Valley as a convenient one for designating the whole district which it waters. Since then an electoral division has been formed to which the same name has been given; but this includes places, which although contiguous, are not within its geographical limits.

Occupying, as it does, a central position in the midst of the great manufacturing towns of the West Riding, Spen Valley has partaken largely of their prosperity, and now the little villages of fifty years ago, which were then divided by long stretches of green fields, have expanded and crept towards each other until boundary lines have been well nigh lost, and the whole has now virtually become one community.

The early history of this portion of Yorkshire, and indeed of the whole county, is enveloped in such a dense cloud of mystery that it is almost useless endeavouring to pierce it. If we discard the wild fables and doubtful narratives of Geoffry of Monmouth we have little information beyond what the Roman writers tell us. The

first inhabitants of Yorkshire of whom we have any positive and reliable information were the Brigantes, who possessed the northern part of the country from sea to sea. There is scarcely a river in Yorkshire which does not preserve some memorials of this tribe, and the Calder (Cal-dwr, or winding woodland water) is known to have been one of their places of resort. They were fond of hilly localities, and the north and north-east of Yorkshire seems to have been the centre of their power. When the Romans had got firm foothold in the south of our island they gradually forced their way northward, but for a hundred years the wild and savage Brigantes successfully defied their arms. To the desperate resistance and the invincible bravery of this tribe the Romans bear repeated witness in the writings of their historians. In the reign of Domitian they checked Ostorius in his full career of victory, and the invading legions found them in long weary years of harassing warfare in this county foemen well worthy of their steel. Tacitus, the Roman historian, speaks of their valour, and in the funeral song sung at the burial of the emperor Claudius the "azure-armed Brigantes" are mentioned among the foes he subjugated.

The Yorkshire of that day was in every respect almost the direct opposite of the Yorkshire of the present. Then the soil which is now trod by millions of industrious people was covered for miles by dense and impenetrable forests, and much of the open country consisted of wild wastes and treacherous bogs. It was called Deira—the wolf kingdom. Savage beasts roamed in its woods, and birds of prey circled above its hills. Among the petty kingdoms into which the northern portion of the island was divided, none appears to have preserved its entirety so long as the little kingdom of Elmete, which had for one of its boundaries the Calder, and which included Cleckheaton, Gomersal, Liversedge, Heckmondwike, etc., within its limits. It was the last to come under the Roman yoke, and had to be pierced by many roads and held by many a fortified post before it could be kept in efficient check. Of the long residence of the Romans in this island we have surprisingly meagre records. It can scarcely be wondered at, therefore, that so little is known about their occupancy of this particular locality beyond that they had a station at Cleckheaton, and that they smelted iron at Lowmoor. The Roman road from Calcaria (Tadcaster) to Mancunium (Manchester) passed through Cleckheaton, and remains have been discovered sufficient to satisfy the learned Dr. Richardson that the Romans had a station or town within its boundaries. A large number of Roman coins, chiefly of the Lower empire, was discovered in a field known by the name of Hedleshaw, during the lifetime of Dr. Richardson. As the coins were several hundreds in number they may have constituted the contents of a military chest buried for safety by the officer in command during some sudden attack, a precaution known to have been often adopted. We find from Ley-

land's edition of Watson's "History of Halifax," that a Roman road also ascended from Dewsbury to Upper Boothroyd along Dewsbury Moor through Heckmondwike and Liversedge; from thence the way crossed Hartshead Moor where it intersected the second iter and descending Birkby Lane crossed the brook at Bailiff Bridge whence it ascended to Lightcliffe.

A few hundred yards from Hartshead Church, and on the line of this old Roman road at a point which overlooks Spen Valley, stands a venerable relic which has come down to us with a Roman name—Walton Cross—but which most writers maintain, nevertheless, to be of Saxon origin. Only the base of this interesting relic remains,



Walton Cross.

but it is not difficult to realise the appearance it would present when it was complete. It is supposed by some that the very ancient stone cross which stands on the road side at Hightown, and which is still a puzzle to antiquarians, is the one which originally surmounted this huge block. If it ever did, which antiquarians do not credit, there must have been a shaft of considerable altitude between, as a moment's inspection of the socket will testify. A stranger seeing this stone for the first time would perhaps be puzzled to account for its situation, standing as it does in a small field at a little distance from the highway; but only a few years ago, as many will remember, it stood on a small piece of waste land on the road side. This strip of waste has since been added to the adjoining