



PREFACE.

HOW AND WHY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN.

I have been very keenly interested in local history since my boyhood days, and during my forty years of public service in Heckmondwike, I have had an exceptional opportunity of making myself acquainted with the life, manners, customs, dialect, ideals, and religion of the people of Spen Valley.

I have given many lectures and talks on various phases of local history, and, after delivering a recent address on "An Introduction to Local History," I was interviewed by Mr. E. H. Keighley, Editor of the "Herald" series of newspapers. The outcome of that interview was that I agreed to write a series of articles on local history, on condition that they should first appear in the newspaper, that the type should be kept up, that when completed a private, limited edition of five hundred copies of the work should be printed for me, and that I reserved the copyright of the book.

My object in writing this book was not only to interest the boys and girls, but also to give their parents a simple narrative of local history, in the hope that it might be a means of creating a greater interest in the civic life of Spen Valley.

For the pupils in our elementary, secondary, and evening schools this book has a

threefold aim. First, to draw attention to the evolution of our language, literature, industries, laws, and family life. Second, to endeavour to furnish local illustrations of the most important movements connected with our national history. Third, to draw attention to the fact that we owe so much to the humble men and women who have ungrudgingly and fearlessly endeavoured to carry out an ideal, and who have tried to do a good work for the work's sake, and not merely for a reward, but have had a desire to leave the world some little better for their having lived in it.

Yours sincerely,

THOS. WM. THOMPSON.



CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION TO LOCAL HISTORY.

My first introduction to local history was through meeting and talking to two local stalwarts, who, in their day and generation, did a great amount of pioneer work in connection with nature study, archæology, and local history. It is fifty years ago, and I was only a little boy, but I distinctly remember how I became impressed by the personality and enthusiasm of Dr. T. B. Oldfield and Mr. J. M. Barber, who were President and Secretary, respectively, of the Heckmondwike Naturalist Society, which is still a virile institution, with an unbroken record, and is now affiliated to the Spen Valley Literary and Scientific Society.

I must also mention the names of Dr. William Carr, of Gomersall, Mr. W. Venables Rhodes, of Cleckheaton, Mr. Thomas Mitcheson, of Liversedge, Mr. Frank Peel, Mr. Thomas Rouse, and Mr. John James Stead, all of Heckmondwike, to each of whom I owe something of my present local knowledge. Although these men are all dead, yet they have left us memories which inspire us to carry on, and take up the good work where they left off.

We are very fortunate in having preserved many of their literary contributions, which will be both helpful and invaluable to the historian of the future. For many years

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we have felt thoroughly convinced that the old method of teaching history in elementary schools, by means of kings, queens, and battles, was not merely wasteful in time, but also harmful in effect, as it had a tendency to convey to the youthful mind the idea that monarchs and wars were the things that mattered most. The "Great War" has taught us a lesson—that all wars are harmful, and not only retard the "wheels of progress," but the victors turn out to be losers in the end. This being the case, we should all do our little bit to help forward the work of establishing a real "League of Nations."

I have had the pleasure of discussing these matters with members of the teaching profession, members of Education Committee's, and at least two of His Majesty's Inspectors of Schools.

It is very encouraging to note that in recent years a great amount of interest has been taken in industrial history, and also that the study of local history is now included in the syllabus of most of our elementary schools.

Feeling that there is such a great need for a text-book, dealing with the history of the Spen Valley, I shall endeavour to produce one, which will give us in simple narrative, a description of the lives and customs of our people, from the Brigantes, previous to the Roman invasion, linking up, step by step and stage by stage, the most important events and epochs connected with our Valley.

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Mr. Frank Peel's book "Spenn Valley Past and Present," is a very interesting and helpful one, but it is thirty-two years since it was published, and is now quite out of print. There is a copy of the book in the "lending" section, and another one in the "Reference Department," of the Heckmondwike Public Library, but the enquiries for the work are so numerous that if there were a dozen copies available they would invariably be loaned out.

As Librarian of the Heckmondwike Public Library, I wish to place on record my appreciation of the present Library Committee. I am now receiving encouragement in my endeavour to get together a valuable collection of books in the Reference Department, and especially those that have any bearing upon or connection with the Spenn Valley area.

The general public have not the slightest idea how much they are indebted to our old townsman (the late Mr. Josiah Rhodes), for the many valuable books which he purchased and presented to the Heckmondwike Library from time to time; and especially those for the "Yorkshire Section," and through the kindness and generosity of his daughter (Miss A. G. Rhodes, of Lytham) we have recently been able to acquire a valuable addition of out-of-print books for this section.

Local history is not merely educational. It is also one of the most interesting subjects it is possible for us to take up. The deeper we dive into it and the more en-

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trancing it will become. It is one of the easy means of self culture; it stirs the spirit of research; it quickens the imagination; it enables us to better understand the difficulties and hardships of the past, and compels us to appreciate the sacrifices that have been made by the pioneers of progress and reform, all through the ages.

We often hear people speak of "the good old days," which makes us feel that these persons do not appreciate present day benefits. If these people could only get a good grounding of local history, social history, and industrial history, surely their outlook on life would be much more optimistic!

We can all appreciate the idea of "Lent"; but we can also realise that in the "good old days," it was a period of "Lent" for the masses, from the cradle to the grave.

