I. County and Shire. Cumberland: Origin of the Word.

All Englishmen are proud of their country, and know some of the reasons which led to the growth of the English nation and caused its people to occupy that particular tract of country which they actually inhabit. Each of us, further, is proud of his native county. Many people of all ranks for example, young and old, take an interest in the annual struggle of the counties for supremacy in cricket. Yet comparatively few know the events which have caused our country to be separated into those divisions which we term counties. The irregular boundaries of these counties, which are so great a stumbling-block to the young student of geography, suggest that the causes which lead to the making of a county are by no means simple. At the present day, when divisions of a tract of land are made, they are often very simple. Look at the line which divides Canada from the United States. For a long stretch it is straight. Most of the states and counties in America are bounded by straight lines. So in our country new towns like Barrow-in-Furness and Middlesborough are built with most of the streets in straight lines running at right angles to each other. In these cases the whole scheme of the parcelling

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out of the tracts is thought out before the division is made. But in the case of our counties there was no such principle of arrangement. They gradually grew up under varying conditions, and the boundaries were shifted more than once. These boundaries have usually been determined by some physical feature of the country which could be readily utilised, and often formed an actual barrier between adjacent divisions. As we shall see later, the county of Cumberland is separated from the adjoining counties along most parts of its borders by hill-ridges or by streams. Many divisions of the tract of country which we call Cumberland were made before its present boundaries were fixed.

All of us must have remarked that the names of many counties end in “shire,” as Lancashire, while others, as Cumberland and Westmorland, Kent and Essex, have not this ending. Shires are tracts of land which were divided by the Anglo-Saxons, the name itself being Anglo-Saxon, and meaning that the tract is due to the “shearing” or cutting up of larger tracts. Cumberland was never a shire, for it did not become part of England until William Rufus took possession of it in 1092, and it was not until early in the twelfth century that Henry I divided the old Cumbrian kingdom into two counties, Carleolum and Westmarieland, not differing very widely from the present Cumberland and Westmorland. The term county is from the old French word comté, a province governed by a count (comes), and it did not come into use till after the Norman Conquest. Such counties as Essex, Kent, and Sussex have kept their names, and roughly their
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boundaries as well, from the earliest times, and are survivals of former kingdoms.

The situation of Cumberland, which was for long on the borderland between Scotland and England, was the cause of frequent changes in the boundaries of the political divisions of the area. The more important changes will be noted when we consider the history of the area, but in the meantime we must remember that the county in its present condition only came into being at a late date as compared with many other counties.

Long after the Anglo-Saxon invasion the ancient British people maintained their independence in the western parts of the island in three kingdoms, West Wales, North Wales, and Strathclyde; the first named was the territory now occupied by Devon, Cornwall, and part of Somerset, the second by the present Wales, and the third by a part including Lancashire, Westmorland, Cumberland, and part of Scotland. The name Welshmen simply implies foreigners, and was used by the invaders to designate those of a different race from themselves; the British people called themselves Cymry. This name, the meaning of which is not known, was latinised into Cumbri by the Anglo-Saxon chronicler Ethelwerd (died 998?) and at the end of the ninth century the name Cumbria was applied to the territory of which the present Cumberland is a part. When Henry I made Cumberland and Westmorland into two counties, the former was at first called Carlhol or Carlleolm, after its principal city, but in 1177 it became the county of Cumberland, and has since retained that title.
2. General Characteristics. Position and Natural Conditions.

Cumberland, far as it is from the great centres of population has, nevertheless played considerable part in the political and military affairs of the past, chiefly because of the situation of its most important town, Carlisle, close to the Scottish border. Most of it is, as it has been in the past, essentially pastoral, but of recent years the discovery of important deposits of coal and iron has made portions of the county important from the industrial point of view. Not very densely populated, on account of the
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hilly nature of a considerable portion of the county, the people in the past have lived mainly in scattered homesteads or small hamlets in the valley bottoms, or in larger villages and small towns of the lowland tracts. Away from the industrial centres there are no large towns.

Physically, the county may be divided into three main regions which we shall describe more fully in a subsequent chapter. The southern boundary from near Millom to the foot of Ullswater forms the south side of a roughly semicircular fell tract with radiating valleys, in some of which large lakes are situated. North of this is a horseshoe-shaped tract of low ground, which bordering the coast from Millom to the Solway, sweeps inland up the Eden valley to Penrith and sends off a spur north-eastward to the Cheviots. Lastly, to the east of this tract is another fell district, whose east side is the eastern part of the county boundary, while the west side runs nearly parallel. This tract is chiefly a portion of the Pennine range, but north of the river Irthing forms the western portion of the Cheviots.

Cumberland is a maritime county, inasmuch as its south-western boundary and a considerable part of its north-western limit, consist of coast-line with several harbours. Most of the rivers are small, swift and clear, and apart from estuarine portions are all unnavigable, save the Eden, which allows of the passage of small craft to a point a little below Carlisle.

There are no forests as the word is now understood; there are forests, it is true, such as Skiddaw Forest, but they are treeless. A forest is literally an open hunting
Wasdale Church and Great Gable
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ground, and that was the nature of the forests of Cumberland. Woods do occur, but they are not numerous, and most of them have been planted in recent times. But there is still much coppice in the lower parts of the valleys, with thick growths of hazel, birch, willow, alder, ash, and oak. In former times there were true wooded forests, which have been destroyed. The most important was Inglewood Forest, occupying an area of over 150 square miles and stretching S., S.W., and S.E. for a distance of about 16 miles with a breadth of about 10 miles to Penrith. This was one of the royal forests in the fourteenth century.

The climate is mild, and the rainfall is rather high, though, as we shall see in a later chapter, there has been much exaggeration concerning the amount of rain which falls in the Lake District.

The scenery of the county is varied, and much of it is very beautiful. The fell region of the south-western portion is especially fine, and the great scarp of the Pennine chain overlooking the lowlands of the Eden valley is impressive. From a picturesque point of view the palm must be given to the valleys which, with their admixture of crag, bracken-clad slope and coppice, are very lovely. The waterfalls are miniature, but picturesque. The lakes present different types of beauty according to their surroundings. Less familiar, but worthy of particular notice, is the scenery of the estuaries of the Duddon and Esk. It is essentially of Lakeland type, and the sands add to the beauty of the scene. There is much variety also in the river-valleys. The open Vale of Eden, the
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burns of the Cheviots, the becks of the Pennines, and the various dales of the Lakeland portion, all have their characteristic features.

Apart then from what Cumberland has had to do with the development of the kingdom, it is a county which well deserves our regard from its physical characteristics.


Cumberland with Westmorland and the Furness district of Lancashire form an upland region between the Pennine hills on the east and the Irish Sea on the west, with the Solway and the river Liddell on the north, and Morecambe Bay on the south.

The greatest length of the county is 75 miles measured from Scotch Knowe to Hodbarrow Point; and the smallest breadth along a line taken through the heart of the county is 25 miles between the Solway and Penrith. The county encloses an area of 973,086 acres or 1520 square miles.

There are only eight English counties which are larger than Cumberland. It occupies about one thirty-third of the entire area of England.

Comparing it with the English counties which border it, we find that Northumberland and Lancashire are somewhat larger, Durham and Westmorland considerably smaller, and Yorkshire nearly four times as large.

The shape of Cumberland is very irregular, but if we leave the indentations out of account it forms a wide