

**HISTORICAL, TOPOGRAPHICAL
AND DESCRIPTIVE GUIDE TO
DURHAM: CITY, CATHEDRAL,
CASTLE, AND ENVIRONS**

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Historical, Topographical and Descriptive Guide to Durham: City, Cathedral, Castle, and
Environs by George H. Procter

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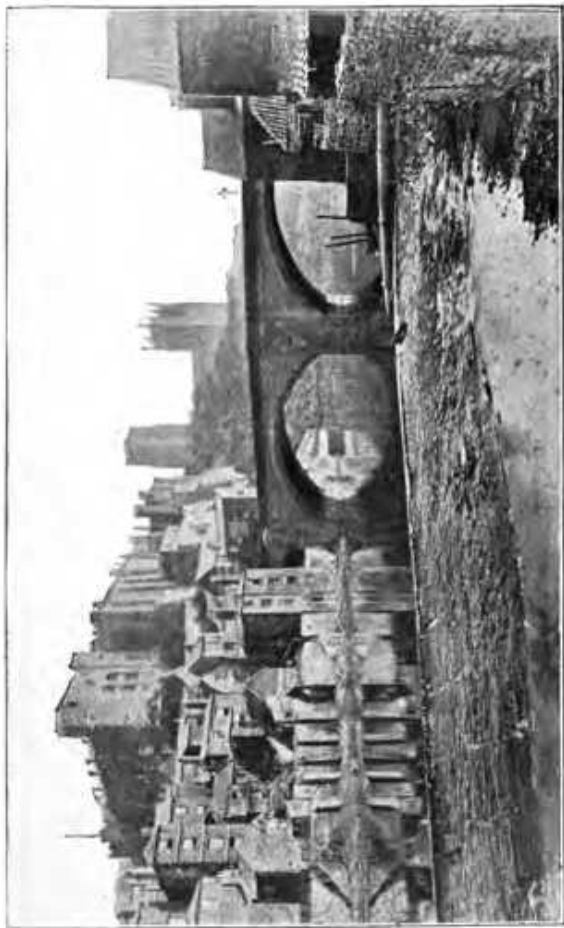
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GEORGE H. PROCTER

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A SHORT HISTORY

OF

DURHAM.

When the foundations of the City of Durham were laid history fails to record. It is lost amid the lapse of ages. It is, moreover, not even known whether or no the Romans ever found their way thus far from their great highway or military road, Watling Street. It may well be presumed that when Eboracæstre (Chester-le-Street), Vinovium (Binchester), Vindomara (Ebbchester), and Glannoventa (Lanchester) were each held by the legions of ancient Rome, the very site whereon the Palatinate City was some centuries later built was unknown. It has been conjectured by antiquaries that the "Maiden Castle Scar," about half-a-mile to the south of Durham, was a Roman Station. There is, however, nothing to support this supposition, which rests upon a very baseless foundation. Certainly the conformation of the ground, and the traceable outlines of a ditch on the north side, seems to favour some such idea, or that in the times preceding the Norman invasion there existed thereabouts a Castle, Camp, or Station, whither the cattle might be driven for security on the approach of an enemy. Where the facts are wanting, however, it is useless to speculate. It may be that the Roman soldiers had travelled thus far, and it may also be that the Anglo-Saxons had settlements hereabouts very shortly after they landed. This much we do know, that both Teuton and Celt found their way into the hills and valleys of the West at an early period, and long before the settlement of Durham was established. Beyond doubt, also, the Norsemen during their successive invasions into, and after landing upon the coasts of Northumberland and Durham, carried their ferocious cruelties far into both counties, and populated both Westmoreland and Cumberland, the valleys of the Tees and Wear, and the eastern sea board of the County of Durham; the proofs of whose early

settlement may yet be found in the Scandinavian names attached to districts and places thereabouts. The march of the conquering Romans, the subjugation of the country by the Anglo-Saxons, and the merciless atrocities of the Danes find no record in the annals of the City, for the simple reason that it did not exist. The story of its origin is soon told. Although an oft-repeated tale, it can never fail to interest, worn as it may be almost thread-bare. It would be an insult to the reader to enter into minute details in connection with the foundation of Christianity in the sea-girt Lindisfarne, and the many events and vicissitudes which fell upon the little colony of religious men who raised the banner of the Cross in that corner of the ancient Kingdom of Bernicia. The narrative thereof is familiar to every reader of the history of the now severed diocese of Durham. When the Danes landed at Holy Island in the latter part of the eighth century, we know that many of the monks were put to the sword, and that those of them who managed to escape with their lives took with them the body of St. Cuthbert. The wanderings of these devout men hither and thither, first in the wilds of Northumberland and then in the County of Durham, forms one of the most striking chapters in the history of the diocese, and the establishment of that great Ecclesiastical incorporation, the Prior and Convent of Durham, within the walls of Durham's Gothic shade. Upon this subject the late Dr. Raine says: "The Bishop of Lindisfarne, with his clergy and their treasure, wandered from place to place till the autumn of the year 882, when they took up their abode at Craike, near Easingwold, one of the very earliest possessions of the See, and here they remained till the beginning of the following year, when they removed to Chester-le-Street, where King Guthred had built for them a cathedral." Like the people of old their troubles were not yet ended, for, as we know, just before the close of the tenth century, the hardy Vikings of the North again landed. In 995 the Bishop and clergy again took flight with the Saint's body to Ripon. When the Danes departed they turned their footsteps homeward. For some such reasons as those given by the learned historian of North Durham it may be that they did not go straight to the old church at Chester. The fabric from whence they fled was built of wood, was old and in a state of great dilapidation, and moreover the situation was wholly defenceless. "Is it," he asks "under such circumstances, to be wondered at that the wanderers should wish for a new church, of more durable materials, in a situation more capable of defence during such an emergency as had driven them from home, and possessing more of natural dignity than the level, uninteresting plain at Chester?" Whatever their motives may have been—and some such as the above in all probability influenced them—they settled at Durham.