

## I. County and Shire. The Origin of Renfrewshire.

The modern county is a political unit. It is the division of a kingdom administered by a sheriff, and this system dates back at least as far as the reign of David I (1124-1153). All such divisions may be called *counties*, but it is only to some of them that the name *shire* can be applied. Caithness and Sutherland, for example, are counties, but not shires, while Renfrew may be called either shire or county. An explanation of the names makes this distinction clear. The word *shire* is said to be allied to *share* and *shear*, and consequently to the Anglo-Saxon *sceran*—to cut. It would therefore mean a piece cut off. Professor Skeat, however, now derives *shire* from Anglo-Saxon *scirian*—to distribute, appoint. The shires were portions of a kingdom which were originally governed by the great earls of the country, who in many cases took their titles from the districts they ruled. Renfrewshire was a part of the old kingdom of Strathclyde. When William I had conquered England, many of the English earls were dispossessed of their lands, which were given to William's companions or *comites*. Each district was

therefore called a *comitatus*, or, in its French form, *comté*, from which we get the word *county*. The counties of Caithness and Sutherland were in the hands of the Scandinavian Earls of Orkney (whence the name Southern Land), until the very end of the twelfth century, when they were subdued by William the Lion. When they became attached to the kingdom of Scotland the Norman terms were already in use, and therefore the Anglo-Saxon name does not apply to them.

Although the counties are divisions administered by the sheriffs of a king, their evolution has been a complex process. They are the final results of a long series of adjustments between different forces. The king, the church, the nobles, and in modern times the burghs, were centres of segregation that tended to group the community in different ways. Thus it happens that there is still a considerable amount of overlapping and confusion in the administrative divisions, not only of Renfrewshire, but of all the counties of Scotland. Yet working through all these discordant forces, the geographical factor is visible. The physical characteristics of a district have directed the other forces, and moulded the political divisions in harmony with natural regions. Of this fact Renfrewshire is a good example. It is hardly so complete a geographical unit as Lanarkshire, which comprises simply the upper and middle Clyde basin, but its boundaries have a well-defined geographical basis. The point at which a large river becomes too wide to be bridged is of prime importance. The stream of traffic down the valley divides here, and the up-river trade

coalesces at this point. Hence a large town often grows up at such a place, and, at this place also, counties often terminate. Such is the case with the Clyde. Lanarkshire ends just where the river becomes too wide to be bridged conveniently. Above this point the banks of the river are embraced by one county. Below it, the river forms the boundary between Renfrew and Dumbarton.

The southern boundary is also in the main a natural one. A broad ridge of flat-topped, volcanic hills runs from south-east to north-west, separating Lanarkshire from Ayrshire. A continuation of the same ridge separates the latter county from Renfrewshire. The ridge is broken through by the Loch Libo valley and by the Lochwinnoch valley, but it keeps on its course and reaches its highest point in Hill of Stake on the borders of Renfrew and Ayr. The eastern boundary is a compromise between Lanark and Renfrew, in other words, a line approximately separating the middle from the lower basin of the Clyde.

Originally there was no such separation. Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire were one. William Hamilton of Wishaw, writing about 1710, tells us that "The shyre of Lanark was anciently of greater extent than now it is; for there was comprehended in it the whole sheriffdome of Ranfrew, lying laigher upon Clyde...untill it was disjoyned therefra by King Robert the Third, in anno 1402." Since then the changes in the boundaries of Renfrewshire have been geographically of little moment. Twenty years ago the Boundary Commissioners transferred certain areas from one parish to another, in some instances from one county to another, in order to rectify anomalies of

administration, but these changes were not of great importance save from the administrative point of view. The name Renfrew is said to be derived from *rhyn*—a point of land, and *frew*—the flowing of water; there are, however, other explanations of the word. The district was formerly called Strathgryfe from the name of one of its most important rivers.

## 2. General Characteristics — Position and Relations.

Of all the counties of the west of Scotland, there is only one that is entirely within the Lowlands, and this one is Renfrew. By this it is not meant that the whole shire is low-lying. Far from it. A large proportion of the total area is hilly, but the hills are of the "Lowland" type. This paradox requires further explanation.

There are in Scotland three well-marked natural divisions, the Highlands, the Central Lowlands, and the Southern Uplands; and these three districts differ strongly in physical aspect, in rocks, in scenery, in vegetation, and in industries. The Central Lowlands are separated from the Highlands by a line running from north-east to south-west, between Stonehaven and Helensburgh; they are separated from the Southern Uplands by an almost parallel line, running from St Abb's Head to Girvan. Dumbarton, Lanark, Ayr, Bute, all are crossed by one or other of these two lines; Renfrew alone falls entirely between them. These lines mark the course of two great faults or cracks,