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CONCERNING THE HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS COMMISSION

By R. A. ROBERTS, Barrister-at-Law (an Assistant Keeper of the Public
Records and Secretary of the Commission)

Read April 21, 1910

THE audience which assembles in this room on occasions similar to the present is, most frequently, I suppose, addressed with reference to some section or phase of the subject-matter of history. As a rule, results of historical study and investigation, whether it be of a period or of a particular series of events, or of the policy or character of some statesman or famous person, or of some political movement, or the like, are laid before you. This afternoon your attention is asked while I endeavour to speak on something different, having to do with the subject-matter of history undoubtedly, but rather from the outside than the inside. I am to speak, that is to say, of certain machinery by the operation of which the crude material or *pabulum* of the historical student and investigator is brought to 'market overt,' there to be bought, I may add in passing, at a ridiculously cheap price, being sold, as all the world may note, according to a strictly mechanical method of appreciation, at the price, namely, of about threepence for each section of 64 octavo pages. This generous dealing with the public is due to a resolution of the House of Commons, passed, I am informed, about the year 1832, the members at that time being persuaded that their constituents were thirsting to purchase Blue-books if only their means permitted, and being greatly concerned therefore that a sufficient number of copies of all parliamentary papers should be printed so as

to allow this eager desire for this form of literature to be gratified at the cheapest possible rate. And I may explain, once for all, that the Reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission are, in form, nothing more nor less than sessional papers, which it is the privilege of members of both Houses of Parliament to receive gratuitously in ever-abounding quantities.

My theme is the comprehensive one of 'The Historical Manuscripts Commission' and all its works, good, bad, and indifferent, and since my purpose will be best served if I have liberty to range at large over the ground, picking up relevant facts here and there as occasion serves, I have secured to myself that freedom, with the kind concurrence of our honoured Director, by taking an all-round text.

For a first definite step in the origin of the Historical Manuscripts Commission we may go back to the end of the year 1859. In December of that year a memorial was presented to Lord Palmerston, then Prime Minister, urging him to issue a commission, the object of which should be, in the memorialists' words, 'to rescue from oblivion, and in many cases from decay, valuable collections of papers, the contents of which were unknown even to their possessors, but which were in several cases' (note how modestly the matter is put) 'of the highest value on account of the information which they would afford on matters of history, law, legislation, biography, and several other important matters.' This memorial was powerfully signed—by twenty-nine members of the House of Peers, including Lord Brougham, Lord Macaulay, the Duke of Argyll, and the three Archbishops; by thirty members of the House of Commons, among whom Mr. Gladstone figures; and by a long list of men celebrated for their great learning and acquirements, among whom stood Professor Creasy, Dr. Milman, Dean of St. Paul's, Dr. Trench, Dean of Westminster, the Vice-Chancellors of Oxford and Cambridge, Dr. Vaughan (then of Harrow), Dean Stanley (then Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford), Grote, Hallam, Carlyle,

Forster, Helps, Kingsley, Froude ;—indeed, so powerful a list of signatories is it, that it is almost a matter of wonder that ten years were to elapse before the Commission, as we know it, was launched upon the world.

This event—the conditions of which were conceived in a very moderate spirit, whose operations were, at the first, intended to be tentative in character ; to have, indeed, according to one proposal, merely a five years' trial—happened in the same month of the year, April, that now witnesses this meeting, on the second day of the month, and in the year 1869, so that it has now run a course of forty-one complete years. The object of the Commission is stated thus : That whereas, belonging to many institutions and private families, there were collections of manuscripts and papers of general public interest, a knowledge of which would be of great utility in the illustration of history, constitutional law, science, and general literature ; that in some cases these were liable to be lost or obliterated ; that there would be considerable public advantage in its being generally known where such papers were deposited ; and finally, that it was eminently to be wished that their contents, if pertinent, should be published ; these four considerations having due weight given to them, then royal authority stepped in and authorised certain Commissioners to take the necessary steps to carry them out. Here are admirably set forth the aims and objects of the Commission from that moment to this, though we are not without hopes that the experience gained in the course of years has improved both the methods and the results.

The royal Commissioners first appointed were a strong body, calculated to recommend the advances to be made to owners of manuscripts who possibly might have looked askance at any investigation of private papers ; and not only were they a strong body, but they contained among their number those who were intimately concerned with the promotion of historical research, and had exercised their energies in other and analogous fields. To wit : Lord Romilly,

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Master of the Rolls, first chairman of the Commission, who had been already associated (in the work of the Public Record Office established not so many years previously in its present building in Chancery Lane) with another of the commissioners, Sir Thomas Duffus Hardy, his Deputy Keeper of the Records, in efforts to make the records of the nation accessible to students by the publication of the series of calendars and chronicles which are so widely known and have been so largely utilised. Another among the first commissioners was the fifth Earl Stanhope, himself distinguished as an historian no less than in other directions. The mention of these three names is sufficient to explain how it was that the idea of an agency which was to be devoted to the methodical and continuous investigation of such historical material as was lying hidden, possibly unregarded or set aside as worthless, in private hands, consolidated out of the aspirations of learned men into an actual constellation with a fixed orbit and definite functions. I will mention no other of the Commissioners first appointed, distinguished and directly interested in the objects of the scheme and helpful in their promotion though they were, save one, and that because he alone survives of them all, an honorary vice-president of our Society. He was then a young man and known as Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice; now, after a long and distinguished public career, he is not so very old, and is known as the first Baron Fitzmaurice.

Between the date of the issue of the first Commission and the present moment, the body of Commissioners has been several times added to and renewed, and many changes have taken place. In the course of the years, distinguished men have come on to it and gone from it, among whom I may mention Lord Houghton, Lord Acton, Dr. Stubbs, Bishop of Oxford, Mr. Lecky, and Dr. Gardiner.

Its first secretary was Mr. Wilford George Brett, who died a year or two after his appointment.

Valuable support had been offered on the part of owners of manuscripts—notably by the Marquis of Salisbury in

respect of the incomparable collection at Hatfield—even before the Commission was issued; but if there had been any anticipation that the activities of the Commission would be restricted or made more difficult, by indisposition or opposition on the part of owners, it was soon proved to be groundless. In fact, the proposals of the Commission met with full appreciation and favourable reception. The immediate result of the sending out of a circular was that many collections, the existence of which until then was unknown, were brought to light and submitted to inspection. The first Report of the Commissioners puts it that no less than 180 persons and ‘heads of institutions’—who, apparently, are to be distinguished from persons—had expressed their willingness to co-operate with the Commissioners, or requested their aid in making known the contents of their collections. The opportunities offered were indeed so great that they amounted almost to an embarrassment. Under the circumstances no more could be done in the first instance than to have a preliminary general survey of the several collections placed at the disposal of the Commissioners, and to arrange a circuit of places to be visited by the inspectors, abstaining from detailed calendaring of the papers. The results are seen in the early folio-sized reports of the Commission, which now to the ardent investigator appear in many cases to be so meagre, so tantalising, whetting the appetite, but far from satisfying it. He is not a little exasperated, I suspect, when he reads, for example, ‘A bundle of original letters,’ or ‘Another bundle of letters, &c.’ with just a few dates and the names of some of the writers; or such a note as ‘Several by the Duchess of Marlborough,’ and nothing more; or ‘Queen Anne to Lord Treasurer Harley (between fifty and sixty letters),’ and nothing more; or, again, as in another report, ‘Letters to His Grace (the Duke of Marlborough) from persons surnamed from A to Z,’ with columns of names and nothing further. I can imagine him grinding his teeth in impotent rage. But looking back now, from the calmer and more organised period, when the reports of inspectors

offer to the reader matter in ordered, sometimes minute detail, as one realises how much there must have been of inexperience, and the embarrassment of numberless collections, some huge in character, hurled, so to speak, at the inspectors' heads, or at any rate pressed into their hands, in those early days of the Commission's operations (101 collections having been examined, for example, in the year 1870), one begins to understand that the inspectors did, on behalf of the Commissioners, what alone was possible under the circumstances, and one begins to view the results of their labours with a more grateful mind.

For the disclosures made for the first time ; the stimulus given to owners of manuscripts to investigate their possessions—to examine coffers, muniment rooms, attics, lofts, even stable-lofts, and to rescue precious papers from the predatory cook or housemaid lighting reluctant fires on the dark winter mornings : to give an altogether new standard of value to what previously had often been regarded as insufferable rubbish ; all this was of itself an immense movement in a right direction. That this kind of benefit was soon to show, is proved by several instances. Almost too well known to cite, perhaps, but yet an admirable instance, is the story told by the present Deputy Keeper of the Records in the introduction to the first volume of the Report on the Manuscripts of the Duke of Rutland, where he relates that the casual discovery by him of a key bearing a label ' Key of old writings over stable ' led to the opening, the first time for many years, of a room curtained with cobwebs, the happy hunting ground of rats, piled up with a vast mass of documents, from among which were selected, not without unremitting labour and direct personal dealing with offensive circumstances, letters and papers that now form the principal part of that most valuable collection, the report upon which has extended to four octavo volumes. The noble owner, when the true conditions were made known to him, at once realised the value of what had then been brought to light, and the papers themselves were forthwith

cleaned, mounted on guards, and bound in a series of handsome volumes, at no little expense.

Another instance may be taken from the muniment room of a provincial municipality, that of Southampton. Here the municipal records were found in a state of disorder, but the visit of the inspector incited the corporation to take a juster view of municipal duty in respect of the records belonging to the town, and there followed arrangement bringing order out of chaos at the expense of the corporation,¹ an example that has been followed in other towns.

The Commissioners, in their second report, pointing to their labours so far as they had then proceeded, when the instances which I have quoted were still the striking and happy discoveries and arrangements of the future, might well confidently speak of the success of their inquiry. I quote the passage from their report, since it strikes the mind as eminently just, and since, simple in statement as it is, it has something of eloquence in its presentation of the facts.

‘It only remains for your Commissioners to state that they feel perfectly satisfied with the result of their inquiry so far as it has proceeded at present. They entertain a confident hope that their future labours will tend greatly to the advancement of historical literature by bringing to the notice of the world important papers and manuscripts, the existence of which might possibly be unknown to the majority of those who may be interested in the inquiry. Your Commissioners are inclined to think that a continuation of their efforts may be the means of preventing those casualties to which valuable collections of manuscripts are liable from various causes—casualties arising not infrequently from changes in families, from removal of manuscripts and ignorance of the localities to which they have been transferred. It may also be of importance to the possessors of valuable documents to know where papers cognate with those in their possession are to be found, and into what direction the lines of correspondence consequent on family

¹ 11th Report App. pt. III.

alliances or intermarriage may have diverged ; whilst to those who are engaged in biographical, historical, or political researches, no greater boon can be offered than well-authenticated information where materials which are indispensable for the due prosecution of their inquiries are preserved. Your Commissioners have also to suggest whether it might not be desirable (with the full consent of the owners) for copies to be taken of the more valuable papers in private collections, not with a view to publication, but as an additional security against those accidents to which all manuscripts are exposed—accidents which in more ways than one have already inflicted irreparable injury on the historical and biographical literature of this country ; and not infrequently on the memories of those who have served it with the greatest efficiency and fidelity.’¹

The allusion to exposure to accident and the part which the Commissioners might take in mitigating the danger, or even in the rescue of papers from destruction, has been justified in various ways in many cases. A signal instance occurred not long ago. It will probably be in the memory of this audience that a year or two back a disastrous fire destroyed a large portion of an ancient historic mansion, Burley-on-the-Hill, the library, with pictures and furniture, included. Here had been preserved papers of more than ordinary interest and value from an historical point of view.

Regarding with sorrowing eyes the ruined building—stark walls, smouldering heaps, appalling confusion, irreparable loss—the alarming question leaped to the mouth, ‘What about the papers?’ That question, the Historical Manuscripts Commissioners were happily able to answer with reassuring certitude. The papers not many months before had been brought up to the Public Record Office to be arranged and reported upon. At the time of the fire they were resting within those safe precincts ; they are still there ; and I think the promise can be made,

¹ 2nd Report, pp. xxi-xxv.

with practically certain hope of fulfilment, that within a very short period an adequate report upon the Finch papers, which were *not* burnt in the fire at Burley-on-the-Hill, will be offered for your delight—at the usual price.

Pursuing the subject of the indirect results that have followed from the stimulating existence of the Commission, I advance some others. Private manuscripts, to which, even when their existence was known, access would of necessity be difficult and intermittent, have passed by gift or loan or purchase into the keeping of public institutions, where access is easy and continuous, and safety as nearly perfect as may be ; notably, to the British Museum and the Bodleian Library by purchase or gift ; and to the Public Record Office by gift alone, because that institution does not purchase. Let me adduce an instance or two with regard to the Public Record Office. Lord Cawdor, in the year 1870, through the Historical Manuscripts Commission, deposited there the magnificent heraldic and genealogical collection in four volumes known as the 'Golden Grove Book,' as a gracious loan for public use. The 'Cornwallis' papers were similarly deposited by Lord Braybrooke in 1880 ; and the 'Chatham papers,' an immense series of correspondence of the first Earl of Chatham and his son William Pitt, was first entrusted to the care of the Historical Manuscripts Commission in the Public Record Office in 1888, and subsequently devised to the nation by the will of the public-spirited owner, Admiral Pringle. I should also mention the Manchester papers and the Shaftesbury papers.

As another indirect result, I may adduce, I think, the praiseworthy operations of special and local societies and private persons. The early labours of the inspectors sent out by the Commissioners disclosed what did or should exist and pointed the way. And now has been accomplished fine work, such as that of the present Provost of King's College, Cambridge, for the muniments of the Colleges, to refer to one notable example. I read in a recent issue of *The Times*, with

great interest, another and quite late instance : the account of the operations of the Cantilupe Society on the diocesan records of Hereford.

And yet one more indirect result, if you please : mechanical, it may be, but nevertheless most important. Many a manuscript, fast falling into final decay, has, through the advice and under the direction of the Commission (but, of course, at the expense of the owners), not only renewed its crisp youth, but has also been endowed with enduring qualities that will enable it to survive for the information and delight of generations not only yet unborn but belonging to a future entirely outside our present ken.

The passage that I read just now expressed the views and sentiments of the Commissioners in 1871, after their operations had been carried on for a couple of years or so. We stand at this moment with a retrospect of nearly forty years separating us from that time.

Before I address myself to some aspects of the work accomplished during this period, let me explain a characteristic of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, which its persistence in being for more than a generation tends to conceal : from some, that is, but not from everybody, for not long ago I was asked when the volumes emanating from the commission would probably come to an end. The question was put to me by a binder of books for a gentleman's library who desired to know how much cloth of a particular colour it would be necessary for him to lay in stock, so that the backs of the whole series of Historical Manuscripts Commission Reports might be consistent as regards their aspect on the library shelves. I was fain to reply : that we had existed for forty years or more, and that there was a presumption that still, year after year, for many years to come, new volumes would appear. From his point of view this reply was, I doubt not, most unsatisfactory. There was nothing inherently absurd in his question, for the Historical Manuscripts Commission is, strictly speaking, a 'Temporary Commission,' with a big 'T' indeed, but yet

of the class in which are also included the Epizootic Abortion Committee, the Vivisection Commission, the Sewage Disposal Commission, the Shipping Rings Commission, and the like, having therefore presumably an end in view in more senses than one. But since, at the present moment, the work to which its energies may be legitimately and to good purpose devoted seems rather to increase in quantity than to decrease, that end, subject of course to the will of Parliament, is practically not in view but altogether out of sight. Speaking from a knowledge of the material that offers itself in many quarters, which of necessity, as it appears to me, must still be brought to the workshop of the Commission to be dealt with according to the methods which it now employs, it will indeed be remarkable if the Historical Manuscripts Commission does not continue to exist, with the good will even of the sorely taxed subject, for many a decade yet to come. What was said by the Commissioners in the year 1879 may be said with even added emphasis in 1910: 'There seems no likelihood that the labours of your Commissioners will shortly cease from want of material upon which to operate.'

I am afraid we do not now accomplish the Herculean task of reporting upon over a hundred separate collections of manuscripts in the course of one short period of twelve months, as our predecessors did in 1870. Pursuing present methods and working according to the present scale, so much could not be even attempted. The aim is, in regard to what is done, to do it adequately and exhaustively for the purposes of the student. An inspector of old time set his hand to the following statement: 'I determined, in the preparation of my list, to aim less at conciseness than at an explanatory amplitude that should satisfy, whilst provoking, the peruser's curiosity. With Mr. So-and-So's book (he continues) and the volumes of the *Archaeologia* at his side, the student will not come, in the following catalogue, on many matters respecting which he will find it necessary to seek further information at'—the particular place where

the manuscripts in question were deposited. That collection of manuscripts has latterly come under notice again, and with all due deference to the memory of our dead and gone and most worthy inspector, I cannot affirm that his statement exactly fits the facts. But his statement does embody the aim and desires of the Commissioners, according to present thought and purpose, in their work as now carried on, and this will justify, I hope, the lesser output. Since 1903, when I had the honour to be appointed secretary to the Commission on the death of the late Mr. J. J. Cartwright—whose memory and whose services in connexion with the Commission you will allow me to recall here with respect and gratitude—the Commissioners have issued about fifty separate volumes of reports, some of them extending to nearly 800 pages, and some of the volumes including reports on several different collections, all with introductions and for the most part carefully made indexes.

Addressing myself to that aspect of my subject which regards the whole of the operations of the Commission during the last forty years, I attempt a task which obviously to everybody present can only be accomplished in the most summary manner. Its essential work, under the guidance of successive acting Commissioners and secretaries, has, of course, been done chiefly by the aid of inspectors upon whose knowledge and discretion great reliance has necessarily been placed. It would be in vain for me to name names, but among the inspectors in the past have been men of reputation and great attainments, and I think I may say, with general assent, that the Commission at present is not less well served by its inspectors than it has been in the past. Anyone examining the series of reports will remark, I think, that in its earlier days the personality of the inspector was perhaps intruded into his report more prominently than is now the case. One finds such passages as these: 'It is to these letters that the deepest interest attaches as she signs herself in a bold handwriting indicative of the strong and earnest character which her correspondence

shows her to have possessed. . . . They are addressed to her son on the outbreak of the Civil War, and in the impassioned and affecting eloquence with which she appeals to him not to take arms against the King, there is reflected the throes of grief which she shared in common with thousands of English mothers to whom the Civil War brought the distraction of divided households,' and so on. This may be pleasant reading and is certainly fine writing, but to-day we should consider it in the body of a report not strictly 'business,' and I fear ruthlessly cut it out; and I have no doubt that the serious student will not unwillingly exchange for a descriptive report of this character one that sets out the letters and allows them to speak for themselves.

Distinguishing between the successive reports of their operations presented by the Commissioners to His Majesty the King and subsequently printed (the 17th Report made in 1907 is the last issued) and the reports of inspectors, you will find, set out in an appendix to the former, first, a list of all the reports of inspectors issued, and then a list of the names of all the owners whose collections up to June 1907 had been completely dealt with. Subsequent additions appear in the lists published within the covers of each new inspector's report. It would be impossible for me this afternoon to summarise the contents of the inspectors' Reports in general. But I should like just to name some of the series which will be found among them; for example, the 'Cecil Manuscripts,' the twelfth part of which will shortly appear, bringing the calendar down to the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. To characterise these papers, I go back to a dictum of the Commissioners in the fourth report made in 1874. 'The value and extent of this correspondence, to which every person of any note at the time contributed, may be judged by the fact that scarcely a day passes from the accession of Edward VI to the close of the century' (and I may now interpolate, for several years of the next century) 'which does not produce one or more letters connected with passing events, and generally

from those whose rank and position enabled them to furnish the most secret and authentic intelligence. In these papers, the history of the times writes itself off from day to day, and almost from hour to hour, with the minuteness of a daily journal, but with a precision to which no ordinary journal could make pretence.' There are other series of papers to which almost the same words, *mutatis mutandis*, might be applied. For example, the series of the House of Lords papers, among the first to be undertaken, but no longer under the immediate control of the Commissioners; the three volumes of Coke Manuscripts, belonging to Earl Cowper; the four volumes of the Manuscripts of the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir; the eight volumes of the Ormonde Manuscripts (three of the old series, five of the new, a sixth shortly to be added, and more to follow); the eight volumes of the Manuscripts of the Duke of Portland; the five volumes of the Grenville papers belonging to Mr. Fortescue at Dropmore, a sixth on the point of appearing, a seventh soon to be in the printers' hands; the papers relating to the War of Independence found in Vol. II of the 'Dartmouth' Report, Vol. II of the 'Stopford—Sackville' Report, the 'Knox' Report (Var. Coll. VI), the four volumes of the 'American Manuscripts in the Royal Institution,' and elsewhere; the Jacobite papers in the series of Stuart Manuscripts belonging to His Majesty the King, of which another volume is nearly due, and yet another is in the press; the manuscripts of the Marquess of Bath, noticed summarily and with tantalising brevity in early reports, but of which three volumes in a better form have appeared already, sequels of which are, I trust, in the womb of the future—with single reports which lack of time forbids me to name. Altogether, there is presented in the series of reports a body of historical material of a first-hand character which is, perhaps, at once the joy and the despair of the student and writer. What a mine of wealth it is! You may sit in your library with some 140 volumes of printed matter at hand, acquired at the price of about three farthings a sheet, and out of these

unpretending straw-coloured volumes write much of English history and English biography, or weave innumerable romances 'founded on fact.' You may get into close and intimate touch with a large number of the men and women famous in English story, and with many, many more, some worthy, some not, whose names and personalities these volumes rescue from oblivion. If, in 1872, the Commissioners of that day could justifiably affirm, with some amount of pride in the work so far accomplished, 'it is not too much to say that there is scarcely an important historical event, certainly no period of English history, which has not received some elucidation from the operations of the Commission,' I venture to think that the statement is true in an infinitely greater degree at the present moment.

For the material upon which reports are founded, the papers of individual owners have been those which have been most largely drawn upon. It is in regard to sources such as these that the work of the Commission is, from some points of view at any rate, most precious and most useful in result. The variety is greater; the disclosures are more intimate and personal; the original manuscripts themselves are for the most part less accessible, more liable to removal from place to place, more likely to disappear by sale or otherwise. The question is sometimes asked—in regard to this or that paper or collection of papers reported upon in one of the reports—Can information be given as to present situation or possibility of access—to whom should one apply?—and to this question, the only possible answer is sometimes a negative one. A report upon papers gives no control over the papers themselves. Indeed, that is one of the dangers, the very suspicion of which owners would not unnaturally demand to be guarded against. They may be supposed to say: 'We generously open to the world the contents of our papers in so far as they concern society; proprietorship we reserve, and all the rights that go with it.' Hence, I repeat, from certain points of view, the greater preciousness and usefulness of reports upon collections of

private owners. But, as you are all doubtless aware, reports have not been confined to private collections: the records of over sixty municipalities have been taken in hand from time to time, and in addition there are the reports upon the records of the Dioceses, the Chapters, and the Universities, reports which have been, I suppose, the starting-point for further efforts of a similar character carried out in greater detail by these various bodies themselves.

It is now very evident that there is, even after forty years' work, no lack of matter. Not only do new collections make constant appeal for treatment—there are vast masses of most interesting and valuable correspondence at present untouched—but there are also series of papers which the earlier reports of the Commission have brought to light, but which have been only most inadequately treated, and might (should I not add 'must'?) be done in ampler fashion over again. As regards all material, then, new and old alike, the first consideration is, *due selection*. In furtherance of this principle, there is a great deal which in earlier times, no doubt, the Commission would have, and did put its hand to without demur, which now it is constrained to pass on to other agencies. As regards institutions—public or semi-public, and permanent in their character—the contents of whose cupboards or muniment rooms should be reasonably accessible, there will be no cause of complaint if they are allowed increasingly to do their own work. And in many cases they have been stimulated to do so. But sorting, listing, and calendaring are matters of expense—the ratepayer grumbles: and it is human nature to pass an expensive duty on to other shoulders. But even here the Commission is not without power: it can still advise, and gladly would assist in this manner.

But after due selection of a collection as a whole, come considerations of adequate treatment on the one hand, and avoidance of undue repetition and excessive detail—detail unwarranted by the nature of the contents of the document or the frequency of its appearance—on the other. And

in this connexion let us turn to the muniment room of an ancient house or family, and ask what are some of the things one may expect to find there. You will not marvel if I say, in passing, that such an investigation is often a matter of the greatest interest. It necessitates sometimes penetration into gloomy, chilly, damp, low-roofed chambers, or, as you have heard, ascent of attics or stable lofts; it involves occasionally aching backs bent over huge boxes, and dusty hair, and always grimy hands. But even if it does, it is often 'very good hunting.' But whether it involve this or not, what are the classes of parchments and papers which, typically speaking, are the result of the search?

1st: There will be deeds—there nearly always are; if ancient, minute in size, but ever increasing in this respect, and increasing also as to their number, until, towards modern times, they bulk enormously. They relate to family property; are settlements on marriages, wills, sales, purchases, &c., &c.

2nd: There may be records of manorial courts, often long series of court rolls, and with them, terriers, rentals, surveys, and bailiffs' accounts.

3rd: There may be county matter, *quietuses*, documents connected with shrievalty, musters, militia, and other county business.

4th: There may be household books and household and estate accounts and vouchers—statements of revenue—and statements of household and personal expenditure.

5th: There will be correspondence, some of the highest consequence, a great deal quite trivial.

6th: There may be diaries of travel, poetical or theological or scholastic exercises or copies, extracts of favourite passages from books, or analyses of them, even school-boy and school-girl exercise books, &c., &c.

7th: There may be illuminated pedigrees, royal grants, maps and drawings.

8th: There may be pamphlets, proclamations, gazettes, newspapers, Blue-books.

And there may be other classes, that I have not time to mention.

Now, as there must be, in the first instance, discrimination between collection and collection, so must there be further discrimination in dealing with the contents of any one collection ; for example :—

The deeds, except as regards those prior to the end of the twelfth century (which are copied *in extenso*, or abstracted fully, with the names of the witnesses), are now noticed in groups only, according as they relate, within certain limits of date, to certain persons or places.

The court rolls, bailiffs' accounts, and the like, often extensive in bulk, will usually be noted as to number, places, and period. Greater detail, as far as these are concerned, must be relegated to the local antiquary or special society.

County matter will be listed, or treated summarily ; contents of papers under this head will not, as a rule, be set out.

Household books will be catalogued and dates given, and interesting or typical items only extracted from them. Estate accounts will for the most part be left severely alone.

Correspondence—here will be the body of a report ; much of it will possibly be rejected and unnoticed, but such of the contents as are set out will be so abstracted as to use the phrases of the writers themselves to as great an extent as possible, and if quoted, quoted verbatim. If it is diplomatic or official correspondence, which is duplicated in the Public Record Office, or if it has been already printed in some publication generally accessible, it is treated very briefly (due references being given).

Lastly, diaries of travel are often drawn upon largely for the material of reports, but poetical and theological exercises will not be rescued, as a rule, from the oblivion into which they sank with the death of their fond authors, if not before.

I need not treat separately of other classes of papers. With regard to them, as with regard to all, discretion sits at

the elbow of the inspector and directs his work. He aims at a logical and lucid arrangement of his material : he makes it the vehicle of *sufficient, accurate, and exact* statement of the contents of the papers before him ; he seeks to extract from them the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so that, relying upon his report, the historian or biographer, or constitutional or economic writer, can truly chronicle a series of events, or vividly picture a scene, or draw the true lineaments of a character, or unravel the mysteries of a policy, or build up an argument ; and to make this possible is the aim and object of the Historical Manuscripts Commission.