

THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION AND THE PARISH OF COMBE.

[From the *Hampshire Independent*.]

Sir,—In the report of the Boundary Commission it is recommended that this Hampshire parish, which comprises the extreme north-west corner of our county, should be taken from this county and added to Berkshire. It is impossible to think that any Boundary Commissioner could have visited Combe, or he certainly would never have recommended that such a marked natural line of division which Nature has placed here between Hampshire and Berkshire should be neglected. Combe Hill, north of the village, is the highest point in Hampshire, and it is the highest point which the chalk hills anywhere attain in the whole of England. The chalk hills here form a ridge which extends roughly from west to east, the average height for miles being from 900 to 1,000 feet. As you stand on the ridge, you look southwards over Hampshire and northwards over Berkshire. The picturesque valley of Netherton lies open before you, close by on the south, and closer still at your feet is the great hollow in the chalk, four or five hundred feet below, which we still call a "combe," and which gave its name to the little village so beautifully situated in it, the steep chalk hills rising abruptly nearly 500 feet on three sides of it. On the north of the great chalk ridge you look down into the great valley of the Kennet, some 600 feet below the Downs.

As Combe happens to be nearer Hungerford, in Berkshire, than Andover or Kingsclere, in Hampshire, it has, since the establishment of poor law unions, been included for poor law purposes in the Hungerford Union. Now, it is proposed to cut Combe off from Hampshire altogether. The next parish on the east—viz., East Woodhay, is in the Kingsclere Union; the next on the south—viz., Linkenholt and Facombe, are in

the Andover Union. These places are not far from Combe, and there is no population here partly in Berkshire and partly in Hampshire. The population of Combe live in the village in the great combe which Nature formed for their shelter. If they are turned over to Berkshire, the Combe people will form the most singular detached part of the population of any it is possible to imagine. To get to Combe from Berkshire you must go up the great chalk ridge nearly 600 feet, and down on the other side about 500 feet.

Surely such a parish, which belongs so naturally to Hampshire, will be left to us. Combe in remote geological days was the uppermost source of the longest branch of the river Test, which upper stream now rises about Hurstbourn Tarrant, but a dry chalk valley, that of Netherton, through which the stream once flowed, extends up to Combe. A bicyclist could mount at Combe and ride to Southampton without meeting with a hill which would cause him any extra exertion. He would follow the course of the Bourn tributary of the Test to Hurstbourn Priors and Longparish, and thence the road near the main stream to Southampton. Combe Hill, nearly 1,000 feet high, was undoubtedly the position which was taken from which the northern border of our county was originally marked out. Why should we lose it now? This proposed rectification is clearly the work of some arm-chair geographer.

There are many other reasons for which Hampshire people should feel interested in Combe. Its manor and church were given by the great Norman Conqueror to his favourite Abbey of Bec in Normandy, and in those ancient days some of the produce of these lands at Combe was carried down the natural vale which the Test tributaries have made, and shipped at Southampton for the use of the Norman Abbey.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

T. W. SHORE.

Southampton, March 29, 1888.
