

CHAPTER VIII

CUMBERLAND COAL, IRON AND STEEL

It is well known that many of the higher qualities of iron ore in England and Scotland are exhausted, and the same is true of Spain, from which the great bulk of our steel-making ores, other than basic, is obtained. The only British ores of the finest quality are those on the North-west Coast, and it is commonly believed that these, which are almost indispensable to Sheffield steel-makers, are approaching an end. It is only since the invention of the Bessemer process that the ores of Lancashire and Cumberland have been drawn on to a very large extent, though iron was made there many centuries ago. There are still traces of the Roman and medieval iron-maker in these parts. Furness appears to have been a metallurgical centre of importance in Plantagenet days, for it is on record that, when the Scots entered the district in the tenth year of Edward II, they seized all the manufactured iron they could find and carried it off in preference to other plunder. Mines were opened near Egremont early in the seventeenth century, at Fizzington in the middle of the eighteenth century, and at Cleator Moor before the end of that century. The metal was, as in other districts, smelted with charcoal. The surplus was exported to North Wales and other coast localities to which the carriage by sea was cheap and where wood was plentiful, but where no local ores were to be found.

The Cumberland hematite ores are chiefly found in pockets and are irregular in distribution. Sometimes they appear almost stratified, where they occur amongst the