

The President's Address.

MY LORD BISHOP, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I HAVE most willingly accepted the honour, and undertaken the duty, of acting as President of the Society on this occasion, but I cannot undertake to deliver an address, either upon the general subjects of archæology and natural history, with which the Society deals, or indeed, as to any particular objects—either archæological or geological—which will be found within the district that we hope to visit this year. I will not apologise for my failure to make such an address, because it appears to me that if the choice of your annual Presidents were to be limited to those who are capable of

acting the part of teachers on these subjects, the choice would be greatly limited. Such Presidents you have had, and very distinguished Presidents they were—they are represented in this room at the present moment—and such Presidents I hope you will have again, but your President on this occasion makes no such pretensions. He has, however, this advantage; not being capable of teaching, but anxious to learn, he represents, I think, a pretty large class, and a class which I think is constantly increasing—viz., those who know enough of these great subjects to feel their deep interest and great charm, and who desire, as I do, to co-operate with, and support, such societies as yours.

I have a lively recollection of the last time that the Society met at this place; I am not sure whether it was in this room, or not. It met here very nearly twenty years ago, under the presidency of Major Paget. At that time I was almost a stranger, to both the Society and the neighbourhood; but since then I have acquired the privilege of an old inhabitant. I have turned into a Mendip man myself, and I feel entitled, as a Mendip man, to bid the Society and our visitors a hearty welcome to this portion of the Mendips.

The Mendips, so geologists tell us, are a chain of hills which once held the rank of mountains. They have certainly fallen from their high estate; but there was a period in the dim past, wise men inform us, when they towered thousands of feet above the sea, and formed an Alpine range in the south of England. That is no longer their condition, but they still form a pretty considerable barrier in the county of Somerset, a barrier which separates the dwellers in the north and east from those in the south and west, of this county. So that I think it is very likely that some of those who come from the westward—and I am glad to see some here to-day—will find the north-eastern part of the county beyond the Mendips a *terra incognita* in the matter of archæology and geology. Taunton is of course the metropolis of the Society, and dwellers there—I

may call them the Cis-Alpine Members of the Society—look upon us Trans-Alpines in this corner somewhat in the light of strangers. I hope the present visit may put an end to that feeling, if it exist, and that, in a district which is certainly not one of the richest in the county in subjects of archæological or historical interest, the Members of the Society may at all events find the charm of novelty.

On the occasion to which I have referred, the visit—if I recollect aright—was confined almost entirely to the south side of the hills. We visited Doultong—which we intend to visit to-day; but there were other places that we visited, such as Ditchet and Pilton, which are all on the south side. On this occasion, with the exception of Doultong, we propose to take another line. We propose to cross the hills, and visit a list of places, including churches and other objects of interest—Stoke Lane, Leigh-on-Mendip, Mells, Radstock, and Kilmersdon. Among these there are no doubt several of considerable archæological interest. There will also be an opportunity—and a good one—of examining a Roman road, a portion of the Fosse-way, which has been carefully uncovered for view, in the parish of Radstock. But I think I may say that on this occasion the principal objects of interest will be geological. The district in question is certainly, geologically, one of the most interesting in this country, one of the best fitted for the studies of a geologist, or for those who desire to know something of that wonderful and delightful subject.

It may not be known to you all that the district is celebrated in the history of the science of geology, because it is included in the field upon which the great and essential discovery—a very modern and recent one it is—of the regular succession of the strata, as ascertained with certainty by the regular and successive presence of extinct forms of life and organic remains, was made by Mr. William Smith, of Bath. In my friend Mr. McMurtrie, of Radstock, we shall have a most competent geological guide. Those who visit Radstock

will also have an opportunity of examining the interior of a Somerset coal mine, under the care of Mr. McMurtrie, and having a personal interest, not altogether theoretic or scientific, in the carboniferous strata of that place, I hope you will allow me to welcome and receive you there, and invite you to luncheon, both in my capacity of owner and as your President.

The double nature of the subjects of our Society, archaeological and geological—I take geology as being the branch of natural science with which we are most concerned to-day—is very suggestive of thought. It is most strange to turn by an effort the mind's eye—and an effort it requires—from the inconceivable distances of time, the awful depths of the past, during which this earth was being prepared for the dwelling-place of man, to the time, according to our human scale very remote, but geologically of yesterday, when man, who was to be the heir of all the ages, entered into possession of the treasures prepared for him. Let us turn from the great stores of material,—from the quarries of Doultong, and the deposits of this neighbourhood, which formed themselves at a time geologically not ancient, but to us inconceivably remote,—to the appearance of man upon this earth, and then to the history of his progress and development. Let us turn to those records of man which begin, I suppose, with the bone caves, and go on with the camps and barrows, and the great monuments of Celt and Saxon; then to the later works, most interesting to us, namely, those of our own immediate ancestors. Let us work our way down through this tremendous progress of ages, to the time when the oolite of Doultong was converted into the Abbey of Glastonbury, and the Cathedral of Wells; also into those humbler, but charming and sacred buildings that stand around us; and think of the appearance of a being capable of conceiving the ideas which these buildings embody and enshrine. Ladies and Gentlemen, the churches of our land—the ordinary parish churches—are always a matter of

prime and deep interest to societies such as ours, and they have had a great influence upon the fortunes of these churches. Whether it has been altogether an influence for good may fairly be doubted. No doubt these societies have greatly increased and spread abroad a knowledge—popular knowledge—of architecture; an interest in our ancient buildings, and a pride in our churches—though it has not always been a pride according to knowledge and discretion. I happened to read the other day an address delivered at the meeting of the Royal Archæological Society last year, by an eminent architect; and he fell foul, as I for my own part was glad to find, with the restorers and restorations—for which his brethren, the architects, are no doubt, to a considerable extent at least, responsible, although they are very far from being the only guilty parties. This gentleman to whom I am referring said, most truly, that forty years ago the churches of the land were in a state which could only be described as indecent, and that now things were infinitely better. And so they are; but he went on to say—and I greatly sympathise with him—that the good which has been done need not have been mixed up with the amount of evil and destruction which has gone on under the name of restoration.

Unfortunately, the little knowledge of architecture—perhaps this is a case in which a little knowledge is dangerous—spread abroad a power of distinguishing between one style and another which hardly existed forty years ago, and led to false ideas of restoration; that is to say, restoration to some architectural style and pattern selected by the restorer. The effort to bring about that result led to all the useless and mischievous change and destruction to which many of us, I think, now-a-days, have opened our eyes. Many, I know, have done so—very many of the persons who have been more or less guilty of it themselves. Now the true word is not restoration, but preservation. That is the idea that ought to be present in the mind of every one dealing with an ancient building. Of course

there will always be doubtful questions—questions not to be settled by any rule; questions of taste and discretion, which it would be absurd and pedantic to ignore; but upon the whole, the great thing, I am convinced, is to aim, not at restoration, but preservation. In this matter, in its influence upon the prevailing ideas and feelings which shall govern every one's conduct in the future, such a Society as this has a very considerable responsibility.

The same architect whom I quoted just now said, "The Societies have raised the restoration fiend, and they must lay him again." The question for us is, "How are these things to be prevented?" Our answer, I think, should be this: By creating and fostering the historic sense—the historic feeling—in all these matters. I know no better safeguard than that. The sense of respect, and reverence, and tenderness for the works of our forefathers, the desire that not only our own years, but the generations of men, should be bound to each other by natural piety. That feeling is perfectly compatible, in my own mind, with the utmost ardour for improvement, and the greatest desire to change, when improvement and change are needed.

But certainly these are days in which the old order is changing more rapidly than ever in all things, moral intellectual and material, and giving place to the new. And thus it is precisely the time when it is of the greatest importance to keep alive and increase in our country that historic sense and that historic feeling of which I have spoken. Let me remind you, for a moment, of two or three matters to illustrate what I mean. Take first the progress of agriculture. Now, in the progress of agriculture, the desire to bring every possible yard of land under the plough has led to the utter sweeping away of many venerable relics of the past. Take your barrows, and camps, and stone monuments. Why the plough has made its way almost up to Stonehenge itself. I hope that process has been checked; I believe it has. We now have that piece of legis-

lation for which Sir John Lubbock deserves so much credit. His untiring efforts have been in a great measure crowned with success. And, what is of greater practical importance in many cases—I speak now of the many minor remains of antiquity—it has been discovered that it does not pay to plough up the down lands. I wish that it had been discovered sooner; but I believe that it has been discovered now, and we may hope that by such joint influences the process of destruction may not go on so easily as it has done.

Then we have the re-building, which is going on at an astonishing rate, of our cities and towns: one of the results, no doubt, of the prosperity of this country. Of course there is a vast deal of change, and a vast amount of destruction; much of which is, indeed, inevitable. It would be absurd to suppose that in all such cases the old can be preserved; but I have no doubt that if the historic sense and the historic feeling had at all existed in the minds of the owners, or of the public bodies which have had to deal with these new works, with all this pulling down and building up again, many a relic, it may be of some eminent citizen of olden times, might, nay, would, have been preserved to us.

Then again, take the subject of language. We have that most interesting subject, the local dialects of our country. No good thing, apparently, can be accomplished without some loss, and there can be no doubt that our universal schooling is bringing about a dead level in the English language, which is not to be avoided, but which is a strong reason for the preservation everywhere throughout this country of the records of these dying varieties. It is a reason for us here in this part of England, to preserve the records of that language of Wessex, which some enthusiastic western men have regretted did not become the language of English literature and of the English race. I do not know that we need regret that it was not the fate of Wessex, but of Mercia, to supply the language of the English Court and English literature: to create that

great speech which has such a wonderful destiny before it. I think I may change one word in Cowper's line, and say that we may be well content that Chaucer's language is our mother tongue. Yet the idea does supply a motive to every one who has turned his mind that way at all to observe, and, so far as in him lies, to preserve and appreciate the interesting relics of old speech which we may still find around us, and give some attention to a study which appears to me to be one of the most fascinating of all.

This Society, I know, has done a good deal for the preservation of what I have called the language of Wessex. I do not know whether still more might not be done; for instance, whether further efforts might not be made by those who take an interest in such subjects, to trace out the distinction between the dialects of Somerset east and west of the Parrett, and the supposed influence of the surviving Celtic race among us upon the language which they learned from their conquerors. However that may be, I can assure those who have not tried, of the intense interest which any one, with a little study and knowledge, may find in keeping his ears open for the local language, and in now and then lighting upon a new word, which carries his thoughts far away, and brings him into connection with half-a-dozen members of the great Teutonic family of languages. In comparing it, and discovering, as he will, its relation or its identity with the German, or Danish, or Early-English—I was on the point of saying Anglo-Saxon—Middle-English, or Gothic, he will find pleasure and profit; but the charm lies in getting such words from the living lips; and he can do so if he keep his ears open.

I will detain you no longer. I have said more than I intended, certainly, but I think I have kept my promise not to impart to you any archaeological or geological information. I have only endeavoured to make my words an overture to our meetings; to strike a few notes which may be in harmony with the pursuits of these three days. I hope we may have some

fine drives over the neighbouring country, if we are favoured by the weather, and that those who are strangers here may see some of the splendid views from these our Mendip Alps, of which we have every reason to be proud.

Mr. E. A. FREEMAN moved a vote of thanks to the noble President for the sound and practical advice which he had been good enough to give them. For the last thirty-eight years he had in some measure watched the career of Lord Carlingford, for at that period he had occasion to look up to him as one who did certain things better than he did. Thirty-eight years ago he competed for the Lord Chancellor's prize, the subject being the effects of the Norman Conquest, but Mr. Fortescue, of Christ Church, got it, and he did not. He was very glad indeed that he did not get it, or he might have undergone the temptation—he would not say Lord Carlingford had yielded to it—of thinking that he had done all that he could in the matter, and had no more to learn. But he did not get the prize, and could not possibly, therefore, fall under the temptation. Perhaps in the period named he had learned a little more of that very subject in which Lord Carlingford outdid him. Since then, if his lordship had not written quite so much, he had done a great deal more than he (Mr. Freeman) had, and those who helped to make history were after all the persons whom those who wrote it had to look up to, because if they did not make it others would not have to write it. They had to thank their President for every word that he had said—above all things, for the warning that he had given them with regard to the preservation of the few things that were left. Lord Carlingford had spoken of the restoration of the churches. He for one could heartily agree with every word that the noble President had said on that subject. The most remarkable example of all within the last few years was that of the west end of St. Alban's Abbey, anything like which no mortal man ever saw. It utterly destroyed the whole history—the

wonderful history—of the western part of that remarkable building, and all because one particular man was allowed to work his own fancies. Some edifices were being finished which he could not help thinking would be better left unfinished, and amongst others he might mention the spire of St. Mary Redcliffe church, which was left in an incomplete state for several centuries. He could not help thinking that the man who left it unfinished knew better than the man who finished it. He thought it was a great pity to destroy Bishop Montague's ceiling in the parish church at Bath, which told how the church was left desolate at the dissolution, in the time of Henry VIII, and how the roof was at last put up by Bishop Montague, in the reign of James I. The old ceiling had gone, and in its place they had one with beautiful tracery, which was better in appearance, but it lacked the historic associations of its predecessor. Small domestic antiquities perished daily. There was no part of the kingdom richer in old houses—in the small bits of old houses—than this particular district. In the village of Croscombe nearly every house was an old building, and a great many of them were ancient houses. These were perishing day by day. Two years ago he saw that one of the best doorways in Croscombe was utterly destroyed. Many of these small bits of interesting antiquities had been swept away during the past twenty years, for no reason whatever. They perished daily, and no one seemed to care anything about them. If the owner were a rich man, and lived a long way off, he probably did not know of their existence; and if he were a poor man he swept the relics away in sheer ignorance.

THE BISHOP OF BATH AND WELLS said he was only too glad to follow in the very cordial expression of thanks which they all owed to Lord Carlingford for the wise and suggestive remarks that he had made. They particularly interested him, touching, as they did, on so many points worthy of attention.

The resolution was cordially received.

LORD CARLINGFORD, in reply, said he would not detain them beyond a moment. He would only express his most hearty thanks for the way in which they had received the resolution moved by his friend Mr. Freeman, and seconded by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese. But he must say a word with reference to the anecdote of Mr. Freeman. He remembered that soon after he became a dweller in that part of the country he attended an agricultural dinner at Wells, in the course of which he made the curious and almost grotesque discovery that when, years before, he obtained the Oxford prize for the English essay, upon the subject of the Norman Conquest, he had actually beaten the great historian, Mr. Freeman—who sat beside him at that dinner. He could not avoid at the time a certain sense of pride, but his permanent feeling in the matter had been to congratulate the University of Oxford, and whoever it was who chose the subject for the essay for which Mr. Freeman and he competed, upon the fact—he believed that he drew a reasonable conclusion—that they had directed the mind of Mr. Freeman to that great passage of English history, and so produced the great national work of which they had been since possessed.

This concluded the business of the Annual Meeting.