

## The President's Address.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I MUST begin by bidding you a cordial welcome to what has been justly described by an old writer as 'the pleasant and fertile parish of Castle Cary, which both in respect to soil and climate cannot well be excelled.' Although this place was visited by your Society in the years 1857 and 1878, it has not before had the honour of being chosen as the headquarters of such a learned and distinguished body. I feel sure that your visit will serve greatly to stimulate amongst us the study of Archæology and Natural History, which has here recently shown considerable signs of revival in the formation of a local Field Club, and the production of several interesting parochial records. Although we cannot boast of many antiquities immediately on the spot, I trust that this will be found a convenient centre for lionising the principal objects of interest in the adjoining parishes, especially those that were left unvisited by the Society on its visit to Bruton twelve years ago.

Last year we met in the extreme north-west of the county, close to the borders of Devonshire. This year your Counsel have wisely taken you to the south-eastern corner, to a place about ten miles distant from Wiltshire and Dorsetshire. By comparing this neighbourhood with that of Minehead, you at once realise the great variety in both natural and artificial features to be found within the county of Somerset. In place

of the bare purple heaths of Exmoor, you have here smiling green pastures, richly covered with old elms. The hard and bold forms of the old Devonian rocks are replaced by the softer slopes of our Oolitic hills and the level plains of the Lias. Our quarries here supply worse metal for roads, but far more tractable building material. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a more convenient combination for the builder than the Oolitic freestones and the Lias paving-stones which lie respectively above and below the town of Castle Cary. It is not surprising, therefore, that the buildings of this neighbourhood (putting aside many inartistic products of the nineteenth century) are, as a rule, solid, satisfactory, and often handsome specimens of the constructive art. We have no Dunster Castle or Cleeve Abbey, but we can show you a fair number of good old manor and yeomen's houses, and a set of handsome Perpendicular churches unrivalled outside Somersetshire, and hardly surpassed within our own county. Of the manor houses, you will see fine specimens at Cadbury and Lyte's Cary. Of the churches, you will not fail to admire Queen Camel, North Cadbury, and Ditcheat. Though perhaps none of these latter are equal to the group of splendid towers which is found within a few miles to the north and east of Castle Cary, at Evercreech, Batcombe, and Bruton—all visited by this Society in recent years.

The number of our parish churches round here is very great owing to the small size of the parishes, as may be appreciated by a relative of mine having counted no less than thirty towers and spires visible in the winter-time from the brow of the hill above Castle Cary.<sup>1</sup> The body of these churches is often in

<sup>1</sup> *Churches* :—Ansford, Alford, Ashcot, Barrow (N. and S.), Barton St. David, Baltonsborough, Bruton, Butleigh, W. Bradley, Castle Cary, Cadbury (N. and S.), Chesterblade, Compton Pauncefote, Ditcheat, Doultling, Evercreech, Frome (Woodlands), Hornblotton, Highbridge (or Huntspill?), King-Weston, Kingsdon, Lydford (E. and W.), Lovington, Penselwood, Stoke Trister. Shaftesbury, Wheathill (and possibly Glastonbury, Horrington, and Somerton). *Pillars* :—Alfred's Tower, Cranmore Tower, Glastonbury Tor, Hood's, Burton Pynsent, and Wellington Pillars.

whole or in part earlier than the Perpendicular period. Small portions of Norman work are not uncommon, especially in the doorways and fonts. But the towers and the main portions of the larger churches date almost without exception from the century and a half preceding the Reformation. Throughout the fifteenth century there must have been a vast amount of wealth expended on church building in this neighbourhood, and luckily the excellent materials found in the Doulling, Maperton, and other local quarries were used with becoming taste and skill. This simultaneous and uniform excellence in architecture may, I believe, be partly attributed to the fact that the church revenues of many of our parishes were in the hands of rich monastic bodies, like those of Glastonbury and Bruton. But it can only be fully explained by recognising the great prosperity at that period of the wool-producing and cloth-manufacturing industries which so largely prevailed in this part of the county. The present Vicar of Castle Cary, in his recently published historical notes on this parish (which every visitor will, I am sure, find of great use and interest), has pointed out the early date at which this town became celebrated for its manufacture of coarse cloth; and all through the middle ages, and for many centuries previous to the present, the neighbouring towns of Bruton and Shepton Mallet have been largely occupied in the same industries. The introduction of steam power has now, unfortunately, extinguished our local cloth-weaving, and converted most of the water-wheels which used to turn the mills to the more humble function of grinding corn. Thus, close to the line of the Great Western Railway between this town and Bruton, you will see a large corn-mill, worked by the river Brue, which still bears the name of Gants' Mill, from the Flemish weaver of Ghent who settled there at the end of the 13th century. Although Castle Cary no longer produces Cary cloth, it still, I am glad to say, shows considerable activity in the manufacture of twine and horsehair seating. The dry hill pastures

to the east of the town are still excellent feeding grounds for large flocks of West Down sheep, while the rich lias plain that stretches to the west now forms by no means the worst part of the great Cheddar cheese-making and dairy district.

I hope all our visitors, when they have inspected the newly discovered walls of the old Castle, will have enough time and energy to climb to the top of Cary Park. There is no spot, as far as I know, in this neighbourhood, except perhaps Cadbury Castle, from which you can get such a clear idea of the formation of the surrounding country. From the dim Exmoor hills in the extreme west, to the chalk knoll above Kilmington in the east, your eye ranges over fifty or sixty miles of Somersetshire. The two towers of Wellington and Stourton mark the boundary ridges that divide us from Devonshire and Wiltshire respectively. The waters of the Bristol Channel, which may be seen gleaming in a clear sunset, mark the northern limits of the county. Only the north-eastern corner is hidden by the long monotonous barrier of the Mendips. To the south the view reaches over Yeovil and Crewkerne, away to the picturesque outlines of the Dorsetshire hills.

The geological features are as distinct as the geographical. The great central feature is of course the Lias plain, elevated some 150 feet above the sea, but rising to the west in the low Somerton and Polden range, and ultimately terminating in a ridge between the peaty moors of central Somerset. To the north and north-west you see rising from this Lias plain the Oolitic islands of the Pennard hills and the rounded knolls of Glastonbury and Brent. In the eastern view there is far greater variety, for within ten miles we pass from the Lias, through all the Oolitic strata, up to the Chalk, which forms the western escarpment of Salisbury Plain. The change in the strata is distinctly marked by five successive steps, making altogether a rise of some 800 feet.

On the first step or shelf of Lower Oolitic sand stands the town of Castle Cary, about 270 feet above the sea. At the

top of the Park or Lodge Hill (nearly 500 feet high) we are on a level with the table-land formed by the stone brash, fullers earth, and marls of the inferior Oolite. The wooded brow of Redlynch Park and Bratton Hill mark the next step of forest marble, backed by the Oxford clay of the middle Oolites—a cold, wet region of deep clay, on which still grow some of the old oaks of Selwood Forest. The higher Oolites have shrunk to a very thin strip of Kimmeridge clay, lying at the base of Kingsettle Hill. Alfred's tower stands over 700 feet high, on a fourth step of upper green sand, and over the rich woods of Stourton peeps the Long Knoll (945 feet above the sea), almost the only bit of chalk down in Somersetshire. Turning from this instructive view of the recent formations to the mountain limestones, red sandstone, and coal measures of Mendip, and the still older rocks of Quantock and Exmoor, we can well understand the saying of Dr. Buckland, the eminent geologist, that 'he knew no better school for geology than the county of Somerset.'

Passing from geology to the works of man, there is little doubt that the line of county road which runs in a straight line from Alfred's Tower, over the south end of Lodge Hill, to Sparkford, formed part of the Roman or pre-Roman way from Old Sarum to Ilchester. The hamlet of Hardway, through which it passes, in the parish of South Brewham, may probably derive its name from the discovery of a portion of the old pavement. This road passes over Camel Hill, and within a mile and a half of Cadbury Castle. We shall this week visit both these spots, and doubtless do our best to decide the great controversy (especially interesting to our Honorary Secretary), whether or not King Arthur's Camelot is to be located in this neighbourhood. I need hardly remind you that from Lodge Hill you can also see the line of the old Foss-way and the camps of Hamdon, Smalldown, Maesbury, and Beacon Hill, at the top of Mendip.

Having thus dealt very briefly and superficially with some



of the leading features of our beautiful and interesting neighbourhood, I will, with your leave, now proceed to make a few remarks on a subject which, I think, deserves more consideration at the hands of this Society than it has yet obtained. I mean the systematic preparation of a thoroughly good history of our own county.

However widely our opinions may differ as to what ought to be done on this subject, I think we shall all be agreed that such a history is much needed, and that its compilation is an object peculiarly appropriate for the labours of the Members of this Society. I would myself go further, and say that, if this Society is to justify its existence as a county institution, it ought, when it completes its first half century,—as it will do nine years hence,—to be able to show that it has not only stimulated individual effort towards so important an achievement as a good county history, but has so organised and directed the combined activity of all its working Members as to actually have brought that work within sight of a successful issue. There are, I believe, many excellent people in this county who are apt to regard our proceedings as somewhat dilettanti and impractical, but who would treat our Society with much more respect, and support us much more liberally, if they recognised that we were really determined to carry through such a great and difficult task as that to which I allude. We have at present only one work professing to be a history of the county, Collinson's three volumes, now more than a century old, and in the light of modern learning and discoveries obviously obsolete, though of very considerable merit and research at the time of its publication. We have besides Mr. Phelps's incomplete work, more than fifty years old, extending only over few of the forty hundreds, and even there not a great advance on Collinson. We have two works of some merit on the north-west portion of the county, both sixty years old: Rutters' *North West Somerset*, and Savage's *Hundred of Carhampton*. We have an interesting account of

the agriculture of the county at the end of the last century, by Mr. John Billingsby, of Ashwick Grove. We have a descriptive work on Somersetshire by Nightingale and Rylance, published rather more than seventy years ago, and founded to a great extent on Collinson. This work contains a useful bibliography of former publications. These are, as far as I can ascertain, the only attempts that have been made during the last hundred years to produce a complete, or even a partial county history. Passing to town and parish histories, we have a much larger number already published, but the majority of these will be found to relate to a few places of surpassing interest, such as Bath, Wells, Glastonbury, and Taunton. A list of most of these works, published and unpublished, was given by the Lord Bishop of this diocese in his presidential address in 1888. There have been a few subsequent additions, including in this immediate neighbourhood my friend Mr. Rogers's valuable *Records of Yarlinton*, certainly not the 'dullest of all dull books;' and Mr. Grafton's *Notes on Castle Cary*, to which I have already alluded. But, taken altogether, these parochial records are but *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*; they serve but to shew the barrenness of the land, covering as they do only some dozen or twenty parishes out of the 480 contained in this county. There is besides a vast mass of materials for county history. Some of these ranging from Domesday Book, the Pipe and other Rolls, and like documents of national interest, down to the archives of individual corporations and families, are wholly digested and ready for use, thanks to the labours of eminent Members of this Society, and of our recently founded Record Society, as well as of the Historical Commission, and the Record Office, now so ably directed by a Somersetshire antiquarian, in the person of Mr. Maxwell Lyte. Others are, as yet, only half digested, or still untouched. Of these a long list has been kindly drawn up by my relative, Bishop Hobhouse, who will, I think, be able to convince us, when the subject comes to be discussed, that there is a vast amount

of work still to be done before this branch of documentary material is ready for the hand of the county historian. Apart from materials which must be collected or examined on the spot, there is now plenty of general learning and research on early antiquities, geology, natural history, mediæval customs, legal and political subjects, as available in this as in other counties, where they have already been utilised for the purpose we have in view.

Now having given a very brief outline of our present position, let me proceed to make a few suggestions for the advancement of our object during the next few years. Be it granted that the time is not yet ripe for an editor; it may yet be that it is ripe for a systematic and thorough preparation of materials for writing the history of every parish in the county. The history of such a county as ours must, I think, be based on, and grow out of, that of the various parishes and districts forming it. With its extensive area, and widely dissociated members, wanting the one common centre which more compact counties often find in a cathedral town or great municipality, the corporate life of Somersetshire has been somewhat feeble and disjointed in the past. It is all important, therefore, for us to secure a thorough and systematic examination of parochial records and preparation of parish histories. What a parish history should be, can be best seen from Mr. Cox's<sup>3</sup> admirable little work on that subject. It should not only deal with the various old records touching the parish, its church, its manor house, and the various families connected with the soil, but it should clothe the dry bones of archæological research with the flesh of popular and living interests, should describe the natural features and productions of the parish—animal, vegetable, or mineral—its agriculture, trades, and industries both in the present and the past; its camps, barrows, castles, and public buildings; and its ways of communication from the Roman

<sup>3</sup> *How to Write the History of a Parish*, by T. C. Cox, LL.D., published by Bemrose & Sons, 23, Old Bailey.



street and the pack-horse route of the middle ages down to the bridge and railway of modern times. Last, but not least, it should preserve the traditional customs, ceremonies, local celebrations, field-names, signs, games, superstitions, and other folk-lore of the parish, now so rapidly dying out of memory from the assimilating influences of the printing press and the national school.

The principal portion of the parish history, as conceived above, if it is to be done well, should, I think, be prepared by a resident in the immediate neighbourhood, full of local knowledge and of interest, and love for his surroundings. Surely there are, in this county, plenty of competent men to be found in each district, who, with such an important object as a county history in view, would be willing to spend their leisure time, during the next few years, in working on the lines laid down by the Council of this Society, or on those above suggested. To organise and start such a band of workers ought not to be beyond the powers of our executive, aided, perhaps, by a small Committee, specially appointed for the purpose. The purely local records, such as the Parish Registers and Churchwardens' Accounts, and possibly the unexamined deeds and archives of our older families and corporations might be adequately dealt with by those local workers. But they could not be expected, individually and independently, to search the national records, or the county, chapter, or episcopal archives for every mention of the parishes with which they were dealing. It should, I think, be the work of the Central Committee, chosen by this Society, with certain funds at its command, or else of the Somerset Record Society, in a more highly developed state of existence than it has yet attained, to supply to each local historian the numerous data forthcoming from general sources. There would be two advantages in this system. It would not only economise labour, but it would render it unnecessary for the local contributors to be all profoundly versed in antiquarian lore.

Since sketching out this plan of proceeding, I have found that a somewhat similar plan was entertained by the Council of this Society more than thirty years ago.<sup>4</sup> They then proposed to prepare portions of Collinson's History, to be used as the basis of a more complete and correct history of the various districts of the county. These were to be placed, 'with a general outline of the enquiries most desired,' in the hands of Members of the Society willing to devote themselves to the work. This plan received the warm support of the President for the year, the late Mr. F. H. Dickinson, whose loss, I may be permitted to observe in passing, great as it is in many other ways, we must all feel to be specially great on an occasion like the present. In spite of the general approval which this scheme seems to have evoked, I have as yet failed to discover any trace of its having been carried out in practice. Possibly at that time the energies of the infant Society were deemed unequal to the proposed task. Considering, however, the vast progress that has been made in archæological knowledge and taste during the last thirty years, this apparent failure of 1859 should be no discouragement to us in the year 1890.

I hope I have made it clear that I do not suggest either the immediate appointment of an editor, or even the immediate setting to work at the composition of the general history of the county, as distinguished from the series of parish histories. The general history, though first in logical order, will necessarily be the last in time, the crowning stone of the whole edifice. It would of course include, in addition to the description of the natural features, and ancient and modern history of the county, and its constituent parts; chapters on its British, Roman, and Saxon remains; its mediæval and modern architecture; its geology, mineralogy, forestry, flora, and fauna; its agriculture, trades, arts, and industries; its dialects and literature; its eminent men; its customs and folk-lore; its

<sup>4</sup> See *Proceedings*, vol ix, p. 3.

civil, political, and religious institutions, and divisions. To produce such a work in a style and manner worthy of its subject—a work complete, learned, and accurate, and yet concise and readable, will require, after all the materials are collected and digested, an able and skilful editor, and the co-operation of as many authorities on special branches of study as can be attained. Although, no doubt, there would be a vast amount of voluntary labour at our disposal, yet considerable funds will be needed, if not for the remuneration of the editor, at any rate for the production of such a high-class and costly work as that of a complete county history, with maps, engravings, pedigrees, and other suitable accompaniments. I am confident that the public spirit and patriotism of our richer neighbours will liberally respond to an appeal for funds, when we can show them that a well-devised scheme for preparation is in full progress, and that the less wealthy Members of our Society are devoting much time and trouble to the work.

I would here call your attention to a series of so-called ‘popular’ histories, recently issued by Elliot Stock, of Paternoster Row. These contain, in excellently printed octavo volumes, of three or four hundred pages, a general outline of the national, political, and church, and family history of the county, without any attempt being made to deal with the many special topics I have before enumerated. Somersetshire is not, as yet, included, or as I understand, proposed to be included, in this series. It is worth the consideration of this Society, whether or not they should assist in, or encourage, the production of such a readable, but incomplete, memoir of our own county, which might form a temporary source of instruction and inspiration, to be hereafter absorbed and superseded by a more elaborate compilation.

In conclusion, whatever steps it may appear, after full consideration, wise to take, either towards the preparations for parochial or general history, I would strongly urge upon our Council the desirability of seriously considering the whole

subject, so that they may be able, at our meeting next year, to report definite progress towards an end which I think we all desire to see accomplished.

In closing my address, I must apologise for having detained you so long with what has, of necessity, owing to my lack of archæological learning, and the recent demands made upon my time by the pressure of other public work, been too crude and disjointed a discourse to be a worthy preface to what I trust will prove an interesting, pleasant, and instructive meeting.

At the conclusion of the address, Mr. T. E. ROGERS moved a vote of thanks to the President, and agreed that it was time for a new county history, which he thought should follow upon the lines of Collinson.

Mr. CHISHOLM-BATTEN seconded the motion, which was carried.

The PRESIDENT, in returning thanks, remarked that he had made a definite proposal in his address, with regard to a county history, which he trusted would be taken up.

This concluded the business meeting, and the party then dispersed to luncheon.