

Third Day's Proceedings.

The third day of the visit, being the concluding one of the programme, was devoted to excursions to Brislington, Bitton, Keynsham, Queen Charlton, and Publow. The members, who had fallen off in numbers since the previous day, left the Royal Hotel at half-past nine o'clock.

Roman Remains at Brislington.

The first halt was made just before reaching Brislington village, for the purpose of inspecting some Roman remains which had been discovered in the course of excavations on a piece of land near the high road, where it was proposed to erect modern villas.

Mr. A. E. HUDD, F.S.A., who gave a description of the discovery, explained that he and Mr. J. E. Pritchard, F.S.A., had organised a committee to preserve the Roman remains, which had been first found by some of the workmen who were employed in the excavation. They first came across some curious specimens of pavement which they took to the Vicar of Brislington, who at once communicated with Mr. Pritchard on the subject. The energetic local secretary at once took steps to preserve as far as possible what had been found. Under the direction of Mr. Barker, the chairman of the Bristol Museum Committee, the excavations were continued, with the result that some very interesting specimens of Roman pavement were unearthed, some of which had found a home at the Museum. Two or three skeletons and some pottery vessels were also found of Roman date, and various other things which were proved to be undoubtedly Roman remains. A Roman well was also discovered, and this had been preserved and was shown to the visitors. The well was inspected with much curiosity, and Mr. Hudd informed the party that it was thirty-eight feet deep and contained fourteen feet of

water. It had been cleared out to the bottom and was in an excellent state of preservation.

The Rev. F. W. WEAVER said that the thanks of the Society were due to Mr. Hudd for the information he had given, and also to the Museum Committee for allowing the Roman remains to be kept open in order that an inspection might be made.

Brislington Parish Church.

On reaching Brislington a move was made to the Parish Church, where the party was met by the Rev. G. P. WHATELY, who, in the absence of the vicar, the Rev. A. Richardson, read the following paper prepared by the latter on the history of the Church. This Church, dedicated to St. Luke, is generally supposed to have been built in the fourteenth century, and probably may have been founded in connection with Keynsham Abbey by one of the De la Warre family, who were lords of the manor of Brislington from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries, when the manor passed to the Lacys. Later again, in 1653, it passed to the Langtons, of Bristol, who built Langton Court (near the St. Ann's Park Station), the former manor house situated near Whitchurch, and now called Manor House Farm, having been sold by the Lacys before the Langtons became possessed of the property. The Church, which is built in Perpendicular style, consisted originally of a chancel and south transept (containing a chapel), a south porch, and a fine embattled tower, ninety feet high, and a nave with a south and middle aisle—a door communicating at the north-east end of the middle aisle, through the wall with the old vicarage. This old vicarage, which was said to have been the property of the ministers of Brislington from time immemorial, was sold (with the exception of its yard, which still continued to be attached to the benefice till twenty years ago, when it was taken into the churchyard) by the Popham family in 1767, along with the Rectorial

lands and great tithes formerly held by Keynsham Abbey, to William Reeve, the builder and founder of Anne's Court and the old Castle situated on the Bath road near the Tramway Depôt. The Rectorial lands and great tithes, and also the advowson of the living were purchased by the Pophams from the Crown on the death of Queen Catherine Parr, to whom they had been granted by Edward VI. The Pophams continued to hold the advowson of the living until 1891, when it was secured to the Bishops of Bath and Wells as a first step towards providing a new vicarage by the present incumbent. The great tithes were purchased from the trustees of William Reeve (who became bankrupt) by the Gore-Langtons, in 1787, and are still held by Lord Temple, Mr. Hurle, and Mr. Ireland. Rather more than one hundred years ago a north aisle was added, and in the year 1874 the chancel was lengthened and a north transept built to serve as a vestry and provide accommodation for the organ when the old organ loft above the porch and galleries were taken down, and the pulpit, which was a three decker, was cut down into its present form. At the same time the Church was re-seated throughout, all seats being free except one, a faculty pew. The cost of these works was £2,741. In 1884 a new organ was introduced at a cost of £220, and at the same time Dr. Charles H. Fox gave the present church clock to the parish in memory of his father, the late Dr. F. Ker Fox, of Brislington House Asylum, to whom the west window is also a memorial. There is a memorial to the late W. H. P. Stephen Gore Langton, of Newton St. Loe, above the reredos, and one to the late R. P. King, of Kennington House, Brislington, in the vestry. The late R. P. King married a sister of Canon Liddon, who was formerly a frequent visitor to this parish. The chapel, which was built in the south transept, and the only remains of which is the piscina, is supposed to have been built for the De la Warre family, and a slab now resting upon some debris near the south entrance gate to the

churchyard is said to have been the old altar. Mr. Buckle, however, is of opinion that this slab is the top of a monumental tomb, upon which a figure, probably representing one of the De la Warres formerly rested. The two little figures on the tower wall above the south porch have afforded endless conjecture. Some think they represent St. Luke and St. Anne (to whom the little pilgrimage chapel was dedicated). It is quite possible they were placed there to represent the donor who built the Church and his wife. The heads were replaced on these two little figures in 1824 by a local stone mason. The stone in the churchyard commemorating the great age to which Thomas Newman attained is probably the work of an enthusiast. Possibly he did live to be 103, and when the stone was refaced there was a difficulty in telling whether the middle figure was a "0" or a "5," and the carver gave "5" the benefit of the doubt. An early entry in the registers, which date back to 1566, rather later than Thomas Newman's death, give the death of John, son of Thomas Newman. Newman used to pilot the ferry across the Avon to St. Anne's Chapel in olden times, but it may not be the same family.

Bitton Church.

This Church, which is just over the border of Somerset, in the county of Gloucestershire, was next visited, and Mr. BUCKLE gave a long and interesting description of the building. He said he regretted Canon Ellacombe's absence that day, because he and his father had been rectors there over eighty years, and they could understand what knowledge of the building Canon Ellacombe must have under the circumstances. All the alterations made in modern times in the building had been either by him or his father, and they had both of them continuously studied the Church. It was one of the most difficult to understand that he knew of. There was no doubt at all that the building dated back to a very

early period indeed. There were certain fragments left of the work, which was quite certainly before Norman times, and the question about it really was whether they were to call the original building there a Roman or a Saxon building. The chancel arch was the place where most of this old work remained. What they saw most prominent in the chancel arch was a modern Norman arch. That arch was put in by the late Mr. Ellacombe in substitute for a chancel arch which he found there, that chancel arch having been put in by Wood, the great Bath architect. Wood had lived in the Rectory house against the side of the Church, and was churchwarden. At that time the chancel arch was in need of repair, and he, of course, repaired it in his most modern style. When Mr. Ellacombe took down this chancel arch in order to put up something more in harmony with the rest of the Church, he found the remains of a most remarkable arch immediately above, and hidden by Wood's chancel work. They could see on the nave side just the start of this arch, but on the chancel side there was a little more left, namely, the abacus, or capital, from which this early arch started, and which was about the rudest piece of Roman work you could conceive. Above the chancel arch, on the nave side, was a rude string course, and above it the base of a panel. The carving of this panel represented a dragon, and above that a pair of feet resting on a little ledge—the feet of a large stone Rood. An arm, and perhaps the head belonging to this figure had been found in the course of restoration. The figure was probably eight feet in height. Mr. Buckle then went on to indicate that the Church must at one time have been very much higher than now. The nave was at present ninety-three feet long and twenty-seven feet wide, and was once more than one hundred feet in length. The question was how and when did this great building come to be erected. It seemed to him to point more to a Roman basilica than to any style of building that he was at all acquainted with of a later date. In con-

sidering the question of the size of the nave it was a remarkable fact that the Church at Keynsham, about two miles away, had a nave of almost exactly the same dimensions. He thought the two churches must have had some connection with each other—that they were erected by the same people, or about the same time, or else the one must have been deliberately copied from the other. With regard to taking Bitton Church back to Roman times, there was a Roman road which ran through Bitton, and Roman relics had been found there, so that there was no doubt there was a population there in Roman times. The chapel at the north-west end of the nave was built by one of the De Bitton family, who afterwards became Bishop of Exeter. It was an interesting point that the modern work in all the Church had been mostly done by local people. .

The party afterwards visited the gardens of the rectory, the Rev. W. E. BLATHWAYT, of Dyrham, kindly acting as guide, and explaining the many rare and choice trees and plants which the Rev. Canon Ellacombe, a noted botanist, had collected and planted.

Keynsham Church.

A visit was afterwards paid to Keynsham, where the church was inspected.

Mr. BUCKLE, in describing the building, spoke of the similarity of the size of the nave with that of Bitton Church, being twenty-six feet wide and one hundred feet in length. Like Bitton Church it was also comparatively low in the roof. But, supposing that it started by being a Roman basilica, as he thought was the case at Bitton, it had changed its shape completely. It was an indication of the different directions in which two churches, which started by being of the same shape and size, might develop according to different ideas. The first additions to Keynsham Church appeared to have been on the

south aisle, which was another example of the plainest possible Decorated work. At a later time the north aisle was added and south aisle raised to correspond with it. When those two aisles had been completed the west front of the church was quite a feature. There was a very beautiful perpendicular screen, of which only one small fragment now remained, and the carving was very fine. A great change took place in the Church owing to the fall of the tower on the north side. This occurred in the year 1632, and a Brief was issued begging for the restoration of the tower, which had been partly destroyed by a storm, and the date mentioned. Mr. Buckle quoted from the Brief, which gave the date of the storm as January 13th, 1632, and mentioning that it would require £700 at least to repair the damage which was done. As the parishioners were unable to bear the expense, funds were asked towards the cost. In this Brief the amount of the damage done was by no means under-estimated. There was no doubt what happened when the upper part of the tower was destroyed; it fell across the chancel and destroyed the screen. It broke down part of the chancel wall, where the organ now stood, and it destroyed the furniture, seats and pulpit. These were accordingly replaced in the style of that period. The screen was re-erected in the Jacobean style, which was now placed in front of the organ, and the pulpit was also of the same date. The tower itself was never rebuilt in the same position. It was put up at the west end, thereby destroying the west end facade.

The Rev. F. W. WEAVER asked if Keynsham Church was ever used by the Canons of Keynsham, or had they a separate church.

Mr. BUCKLE replied that he understood they had a separate church.

After luncheon

Mr. BUCKLE gave a description of the beautiful tower from the market-place. He said if they looked at the west

end of the Church and imagined there was no tower there, they would realise that on either side there was a very fine aisle termination. The right-hand turret was not in a perfect state, but they could imagine what a fine west front of nave and aisles there was before the tower was built. Although there was a resemblance in the termination of the two aisles, yet there was a difference in point of detail. He had recently spoken of the fall of the tower, and the Brief for the restoration was issued in 1634, so that they might take that as the earliest date possible for the renovation and alterations which were made over the building. He thought they would agree that the present tower was a very creditable specimen of architecture of that date. At that time there was a Gothic revival due to Laud. The present tower consisted of three stages, altogether unlike one another. On the ground floor they had a good Perpendicular plinth and doorway; on the second storey the Perpendicular feeling seemed to be declining, and this storey did not appear to be the work of the man who put up the storey below. On the top storey there was no vestige left of the Perpendicular feeling. The window at the top was not what was called "churchwarden," but it came uncommonly near it. Thus, in the tower was the work of three different styles, and when they got to the top of all it was found that the person who had put on the parapet did not know what to do with the top of the buttresses, but the parapet was clearly the work of an uncommonly clever man, and a man who had seen some Gothic architecture. In spite of all these changes of style in the tower, each of the architects had still retained the sense of the sky line. In conclusion, Mr. Buckle said that his impression was that the tower was begun to be rebuilt in 1634, and that it took nearly one hundred years to complete it, 1723 being the date of the insertion of the bells, according to the signature on the jamb of the west window.

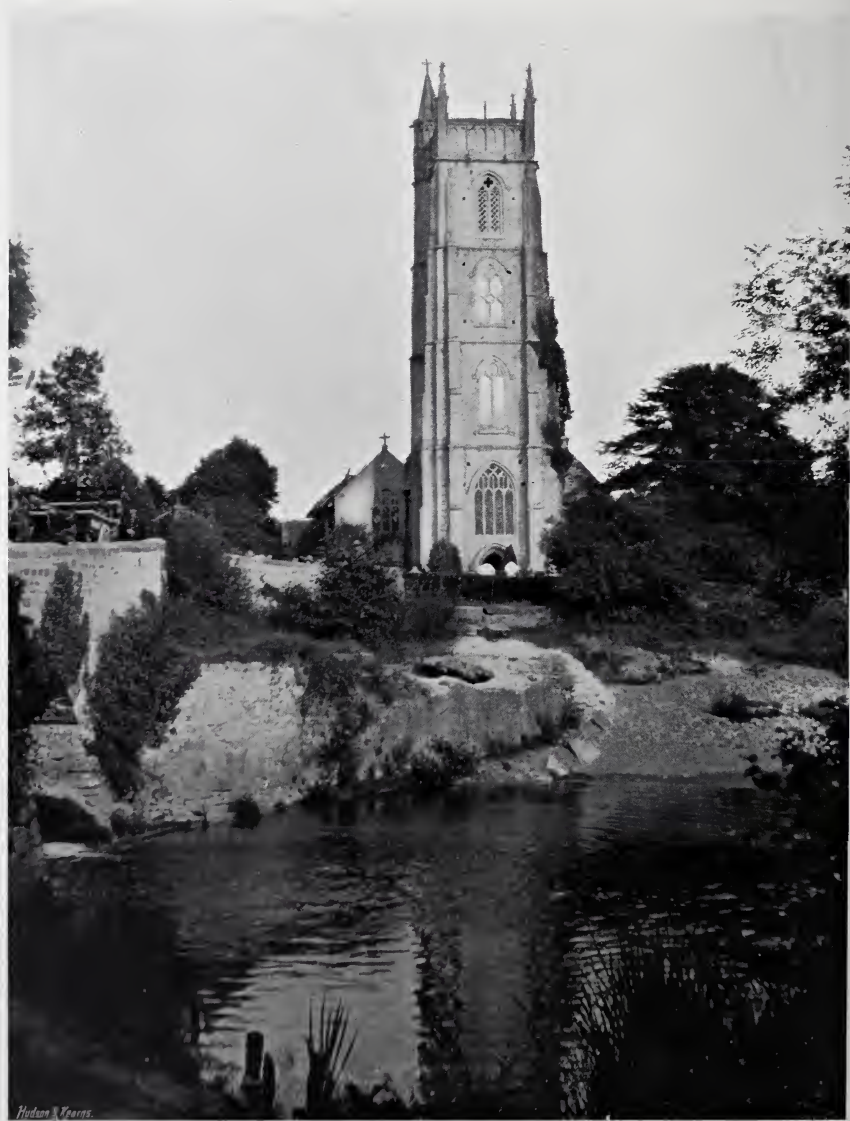
Colonel BRAMBLE pointed out that the parapet appeared to be composed of genuine old materials re-used.

Mr. A. E. HUDD made a few remarks about the monastery which was formerly at Keynsham. He mentioned that about twenty years ago the British Archæological Association visited Keynsham, where fragments of the stone of the monastery were discovered, also a large number of tiles, which he believed were still preserved. These were found in a field adjoining the railway station, on the north-west side of the Church.

Mr. BUCKLE, before leaving Keynsham Church, drew attention to two sun-dials. Over the principal door of the Church was the motto, "Festina lente." The words appeared to mean that the people were not to hurry to come to Church. On the south dial were the words, "Venio ut fur," "I come as a thief."

Queen Charlton.

The drive was continued to Queen Charlton, where the little quaint Church was inspected. Mr. BUCKLE remarked that there was not much to be said about the Church, which was an exceedingly pretty example of a small country church. The first thing that attracted their notice were the Norman arches in the centre supporting the tower. Two of the arches across the nave to the chancel were more ornate than the other two and were considerably wider, and were the only ones that had capitals, known as the cuspid shape. The work was decidedly late Norman. The middle stage of the tower had a round arch Norman window with two lights. The Church was of the stock Norman type, with originally two transepts and a tower in the centre. On the right hand side of the chancel there were two arches supported on octagonal pillars with very ornate capitals, carved with trefoil leaf intermixed with heads. The pillars had this feature of interest about them—the capitals had no neck moulding, and



PUBLOW CHURCH.

that, as he had said at Whitchurch, was one of the characteristics of the Early Somerset style. The chapel into which the arches opened had been pulled down long ago, and there was no recollection of the chapel being there. Presumably the original Norman tower had no buttresses, and it appeared to have been a very low one. At the Perpendicular period another storey was added, and at that time diagonal buttresses were added. The tower had been raised in an exceedingly judicious and artistic manner.

The Rev. E. H. BATES called attention to a rather curious inventory in the registry, relating to the goods belonging to the Church in the time of Charles I, and this was read.

The Manor House adjoining the Church was next visited, by permission of Mr. Basil Haines, who kindly provided delicious grapes for the members. The building was an exceedingly interesting one, and of great antiquity. A fine Norman arch, taken from Keynsham Abbey, and now placed in the grounds of the Manor House, was also inspected.

Publow Church.

The last edifice visited was Publow Church, with its fine tower, time only permitting of a short description of this, and, for the same reason, Pensford Church, with remains of the ancient cross, had to be left out of the programme.

Mr. BUCKLE, in describing the tower, alluded to it as a magnificent one, and said the most remarkable thing about it was its height. It had one more storey than they were accustomed to see in Somerset, viz., three stories, in place of the usual two stories above the ground floor. He believed that the original design for the tower was of the ordinary three-storey type.

The homeward drive to Bristol was then commenced, and before reaching the city a halt was made at the charming residence of Alderman E. J. Thatcher, at Knowle, where the

party was hospitably entertained to tea by Mr. and Mrs. Thatcher, who, on the proposition of Dr. Beddoe, were warmly thanked for their hospitality.

On the proposition of Dr. BEDDOE, F.R.S., seconded by Mr. F. F. TUCKETT, votes of thanks were also accorded to all those who had contributed to the success of the gathering, as well as to those who had kindly provided refreshments; the clergy for allowing their churches to be visited; and Lieut.-Colonel Bramble, the Rev. F. W. Weaver, Mr. Edmund Buckle, and the Hon. Local Secretary, Mr. Pritchard, were also heartily thanked for the services they had rendered, this being considered to be one of the most successful meetings that the Society has ever had.

Bristol was reached just before seven o'clock, in time for the various members of the party to catch their respective trains homewards.

Alfred the Great's Millenary.

VISIT TO ALFRED'S COUNTRY.

THE Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society arranged an excursion to that district of the shire known especially as "Alfred's Country," including Lyng, Athelney, Boroughbridge, and Aller. Wedmore was not included on account of its being beyond the limits of a day's excursion by break. The visit took place on Wednesday, September 25th, 1901, and a more charming day could not possibly have been selected, for the weather was exceptionally fine, the sun shining brilliantly from a cloudless sky. The party numbered considerably over a hundred, and came from all parts of the county. The nucleus of the attendance was formed at Taunton outside the historic Castle, where several large breaks were in waiting at 11.30 to convey the excursionists. They were supplied by Mr. Thomas, of Castle Green and Silver Street. The arrangements for the day were in the hands of Mr. Charles Tite, one of the honorary general secretaries, and Mr. Harold St. George Gray, the assistant secretary and curator, and they could not have been made with greater care, for everything passed off without the smallest hitch, and a most delightful and instructive time was spent. At Durston railway station there was a very large accession to the party, many joining here from the northern, southern, and eastern parts of the county.

The following is a list of the members who attended, but in

addition there were many friends of members:—The Right Hon. Sir S. Ponsonby-Fane, G.C.B., (Brympton), Mr. and Mrs. W. R. Phelps (Montacute), Miss Phelps, Rev. E. T. Vaughan, Mr. B. E. Somers (Langford), Captain the Hon. H. N. Shore, R.N. (Clevedon), Rev. C. S. Taylor (Banwell), Mrs. G. Rossiter, Mr. and Mrs. E. E. Baker (Weston), Mr. J. E. Jones (Topsham), Mrs. and Miss Ewing, Mr. A. E. and Miss Perkins, Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Fox (Wellington), Captain E. G. Troyte-Bullock (Zeals), Miss Troyte-Bullock, Canon Lowe (West Coker), Miss Lowe, Mr. A. Steevens, Mr. F. S. Moore (Bath), Mrs. Bragg, Lieutenant-Colonel Bramble, F.S.A. (hon. general secretary), Miss Bramble (Weston), Lieutenant-Colonel Linley Blathwayt (Batheaston), Rev. D. J. Pring, Captain Philp (Weston), Mr. C. Tite (hon. general secretary), Mrs. C. Tite, Dr. and Miss Meredith (Wellington), Miss Ruddock, Mr. and Mrs. C. O. Master, Rev. E. H. Bates (Puckington), Mr. W. H. Lloyd (Hatch Court), Mrs. Vawdrey, Rev. J. G. James (Yeovil), Rev. H. A. Cartwright (Whitestaunton), Rev. A. H. A. Smith (Lyng), Major Smith (Lyng), Rev. F. W. Weaver, F.S.A. (hon. general secretary), Rev. F. Sterry (Chapel Cleeve), Mr. Wm. Corner, Mrs. Edward Corner, Mr. and Mrs. J. G. Loveday, Right Rev. Bishop Brownlow, Mrs. and Misses Mullins (Weston), Mr. H. St. George Gray (Curator and assistant secretary), Mrs. H. St. G. Gray, Mr. J. H. W. Smith, Mrs. Burr, Mr. H. W. B. Joseph (Holford), Rev. J. C. Fox, (Templecombe), Mr. A. J. Monday, Mr. G. Denham, Rev. Dr. Hugh Pinchin (Yeovil), Mrs. Pinchin, Miss Meade-King (Walford), Mr. H. Franklin, Rev. Dr. McCredy (South Petherton), Mr. Edwin Sloper, Rev. D. P. Alford, Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Warry (Yeovil), Rev. F. E. W. Langdon (Membury), Mr. H. T. S. Aveline (Cotford), Mrs. and Miss Duder, Mr. R. Barnicott, Mr. F. Were (Gratwicke Hall, near Bristol), Miss Impey (Street), Mr. Clark (Street), Mr. and Miss Denham, and many others.

Lyng: The Daughter Church of Athelney Abbey.

After a thoroughly delightful drive the picturesque village of Lyng was reached, and at the ancient parish church, which was founded by the monks of Athelney Abbey, the visitors were received by the vicar, the Rev. A. H. A. Smith. After an inspection had been made of the interesting building the Vicar offered a hearty welcome to the party and then gave a description of the church. He said, "The nave and chancel are the oldest parts of the church, the early perpendicular or transition windows being simply 14th century insertions in the old walls. Both will require very careful pointing; and, in some places, the insertion of fresh stonework. The covering of the roofs will have to be entirely renewed, and, if funds permit, lead should be substituted for the present unsatisfactory slate. The oak waggon roofs of the interior are, it is feared, in many places actually rotten. They will require, to say the least, very careful repair, if not to be actually replaced. In the interior the most noteworthy features are the pulpit, the carved bench ends, and the font. The pulpit is almost certainly formed out of the ancient screen, and is a very beautiful piece of work; needing, happily, very little in the shape of repair. The bench ends are remarkably fine; and, in most cases, wonderfully perfect; but the benches will have to be re-arranged to suit modern ideas of comfort. The font has been pronounced, by those well qualified to give an opinion on the matter, to be not later than the 13th century, while some are disposed to consider it as of Early Norman or even of Saxon date. The flooring of the church will require to be taken up and renewed, an existing vault being filled up at the same time. The tower is a very good specimen of the Somersetshire perpendicular, the gurgoyles being remarkably fine, but the beautiful carved and pierced stonework of the parapet is in a sad state of decay, being held together by ironwork, and will require most careful treatment. The whole tower

will require to be repointed, and in some places repaired." Mr. Smith added that they could not forget how Lyng was bound up with the life of the greatest monarch that England had ever seen. That church was founded by the monks of Athelney Abbey, which was built by King Alfred, and it remained the sole link between the present, with all its hopes, and the glorious memory of Alfred.

Colonel Bramble F.S.A., (Hon. Gen. Sec.) added a few observations, and said a considerable portion of the masonry of the church was of very early date. He expressed the opinion that if the roof were re-opened the improvement would be wonderful. The bench ends were very interesting indeed. He hoped the pews would be altered as little as possible, but if they once allowed architects to work their own wicked wills they did not know how far they would go. The tower was very effective. The font he considered early 13th century work. Alfred must have been at Lyng a considerable time, and it must have been his stronghold for many months.

The Vicar said he hoped to fill the west window with stained glass illustrative of events in Alfred's life.

Colonel Bramble expressed a strong opinion that the Ethandune battle was fought in Somerset, as it did not seem likely that Guthrum would come all the way from Wiltshire to Aller and Wedmore to be baptised. He also showed a facsimile of the Alfred Jewel found near North Petherton and now in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford.

The visitors afterwards adjourned to the schoolroom, where they partook of the hospitality of the vicar and Major Smith.

Athelney: A Sacred Spot.

The breaks next took the visitors to Athelney, where the monument erected to the memory of Alfred by Sir John Slade a century ago was inspected by the kind permission of Mr. Hembrow. The visitors were informed that the monument was about to be restored.

Alfred at Athelney.

The Rev. D. P. ALFORD, M.A., of Taunton, read the following interesting paper on "Alfred at Athelney."

The country at large was invited, last week, to Winchester, the old capital of Wessex, to commemorate there the death, a thousand years ago, of Alfred the Great. Such a national commemoration was most appropriate, because Alfred is the earliest representative of our best national characteristics; because he saved England for the English; because he inaugurated that naval power which has proved to be the chief support of our national independence and of our Colonial Empire; because he is the most perfect example of a king who lived solely for the good of his people.

To commemorate the same event we people of Somerset are met here to-day at Athelney, because for us the name of Alfred is especially associated with this small grassy hillock, and the year 878. And this, our local commemoration, is equally appropriate, for the time he spent here in Athelney was the great crisis of Alfred's life, as it was one of the great crises of our English history; so that we readily follow Professor Freeman, claiming our regard for that memorable year, 878, as "the proudest moment of our local history, when one single spot of our shire, one single island in a Somersetshire fen, remained the only independent England; when Alfred went forth from his shelter at Athelney to overthrow the invader at Ethandun."

Yes! in the Spring of 878 this little spot, an islet then, "surrounded on all sides by water and impassable peat bogs," was the camp of refuge for England's last hope. For, when all the rest of the country had been conquered by the heathen Danes, and when, for the moment, even Wessex was under the heel of the conqueror, Alfred, England's Saviour, England's Darling, as his people loved to call him, found here a safe retreat, where he recovered his spirits, rallied his forces, and

devised and began to carry out that great and successful campaign which issued in the victory of Ethandun. And it was that victory, we must remember, that saved England for the English and for Christ, because it permanently checked the tide of invasion which had for so many weary years threatened the whole land with Danish supremacy and the triumph of Paganism.

We naturally ask what brought our good and great king into such a pass ? and the answer requires a short retrospect.

The country had been suffering from the ravages of Danish pirates for nearly a hundred years, when piracy was changed for invasion, and a great army, led by the three sons of Lodbroc, came over to conquer and settle. Northumbria, torn with civil strife, fell an easy victim in 867. In 870 Ingwar and Hubba attacked East Anglia, and slew its martyr-king, St. Edmund ; and in 871 they passed on into Wessex. Ethelred, a good and brave man, was king ; he made a stout resistance, and, with the help of his young brother, the Crown Prince Alfred, gained a great victory at Ashdown ; but more Danes came pouring in, and after fighting other battles with varying success, Ethelred died at Easter, and Alfred succeeded him.

Alfred had a winning presence ; as a child he had enjoyed the advantage of foreign travel and of a year's residence in Rome, still the centre of mental and religious light. We know that the young king was good and brave, wise and strong ; but when he came to the throne, in the midst of this life-and-death struggle with the Danes, he was only a youth of twenty-two years old, and he was further handicapped by frequently-recurring pains, which were acute, disabling and incurable. Yet, in spite of these drawbacks, Alfred fought so well during the first months of his reign that, before the year was over, nine pitched battles had been fought, besides skirmishes, and the Danish army was glad to withdraw for a time to the easier conquest of Mercia.

Alfred made the most of this precious four years' respite.

He improved his Militia, and he built ships, with which, in 875, he gained a small victory at sea; so that he was well prepared for the second invasion, under Guthrum, in 876. The wily Dane did, indeed, take Wessex by surprise, but he carefully avoided meeting our English host in the open field. First, he stole away from Cambridge to Wareham; shut up there by Alfred, he swore solemn oaths, gave hostages, and promised to leave the king's country. Then, in spite of solemn oaths, he stole away to Exeter, where he was again shut up by the English king. Meanwhile the Danish fleet, as it approached Poole harbour, was met by a combined fleet of English and Norsemen, and beneath the stress of this attack, aided, as in the case of the Spanish Armada, seven hundred years later, by a violent storm, one hundred and twenty Danish vessels were wrecked on the coast of Swanage. Then Guthrum made more vows and gave more hostages; but this time he kept his promise, and led his army out of Wessex to Gloucester.

So far, then, our young king had been too strong for the Danish army; he had followed them closely, he had hindered them from over-running the land, and now he had seen them march out of his country into the conquered Mercia. This was at harvest time, A.D. 877. All immediate danger seemed to be past. The Saxon levies dispersed to look after their farms, and presently Alfred, in happy security, was keeping Christmas in the royal villa at Chippenham. How, then, are we to account for Alfred's forlorn condition in the early weeks of 878? Some writers* have tried to explain it by the weariness of the West Saxons and the disaffection of their Celtic neighbours. Others, following Dr. Giles, have made much of a battle and defeat at Chippenham, first mentioned by John Brompton three hundred years after the event.

Neither explanation is required, as neither has any trustworthy authority. The catastrophe that fell upon Alfred and

* *Pauli's Life of Alfred*, chapter 4.

Wessex was simply due to a complete surprise. The noble king's only failing was too much confidence in the word of Guthrum, the Battle-snake, as his name is said to mean ; but, as the Danish army had never yet fought in winter, but always rested and feasted, Alfred had some excuse for not being on his guard. The Chronicle says nothing about a battle, but it makes a point of the attack being delivered in the depth of winter. Having told us that the Danish army retired to Mercia in harvest time, 877, it continues, under 878 : " Here, during mid-winter, after twelfth night, the army stole away to Chippenham, and sat down there ; thence they rode over the land of the West Saxons, and many of the people they drove beyond sea, and of the rest the greater part they subdued and forced to obey them, except Alfred the king." Henry of Huntingdon adds that Guthrum was strengthened " with a wonderful multitude of men who had lately come from Denmark," and that " they covered the earth like locusts."

The result of this surprise was, so Asser tells us, that Alfred was leading an unquiet life among the woodlands of Somerset, in great tribulation ; that means, probably, that in those first weeks of 878 he was living amongst his own herdmen in the great forest of Selwood, which then covered the eastern borders of the county. Then, if at all, it was, that Alfred incurred the wrath of the cowherd's wife, by letting her cakes burn ; then, if at all, it was as Florence of Worcester tells us, that he learnt to know and appreciate the swineherd Denewulf, who became Bishop of Winchester. Sir Frederick Pollock, Corpus Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford, told students visiting there in August that this story of the cakes was just as likely to be true as false : it was current within a century of Alfred's death, and it has never been told of any one else.

But hard times only bring out true greatness ; never did Alfred's genius shine more brightly than in this his darkest

hour ; never did he show more clearly our distinctive English quality of not knowing when we are beaten. In his deepest distress he never lost heart, and about the third week in March news came to him that awoke fresh confidence. The fierce Hubba, after wintering and raiding in South Wales, had crossed the Channel, landed on the coast of Devon, and then been defeated and killed, "before the Castle of Cynuit," by Alderman Odda and the king's servants. This Cynuit* Bishop Clifford held to be Comwich, at the mouth of the Parret. The arguments pro and con. require attentive study. Dr. Clifford† meets the one real difficulty by trying to prove that, up to Alfred's time, the coast of Devon, like the old Damnonia, reached to the Parret.

But, wherever it happened, this success proved that English hearts were still brave and English arms still strong ; and there can hardly be a doubt that Odda's victory inspired Alfred with a new purpose ; for, immediately after the relation of Hubba's defeat and death, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle goes on to say : "After this, at Easter, King Alfred, with a small band, constructed a fortress at Athelney, and from this fortress, with that part of the men of Somerset which was nearest to it, from time to time they fought against the army ; "made frequent assaults," Asser tells us, and Ethelweard, "fought daily battles."

This passage in the Chronicle suggests one remark and two questions, which demand our careful attention. The remark is, that there is no mention whatever of Athelney, before Easter, A.D. 878. The first question is ; Does not Alfred's building a fort here, just after Hubba's death, suggest, at least, that Guthrum had led the Danish army into this neighbourhood with the intention of supporting Hubba, and uniting their forces ? The second question is ; Seeing that Alfred's

* Proceedings, vol. 21, part 2, p. 4.

† Proceedings, vol. 21, part 2, p. 25. See also *C. W. Whistler's* "Ethandune" in the *Saga-Book*, January, 1899, p. 164.

men from Athelney frequently fought with the Danish army—not, mind you, with wandering raiders, but with the army *se here*, always used for the main body of the invaders—must not that army have been in the neighbourhood of Athelney, not fifty miles away in Wiltshire?

Tradition naturally gathered its charming myths around this, the critical point of our great king's life. The story of Alfred visiting the Danish camp in disguise is first given by William of Malmesbury, in his "History of the Kings," but such a tradition implies the belief that the Danish camp was near Athelney, for only during Alfred's stay there had he the leisure for such an enterprise. Here, at all events, in this small island, Alfred had gathered round him, at Easter, vassals and nobles of Somerset, with Ethelnoth,* the alderman, at their head. Here also he would seem to have been soon joined by the young Atheling Edward, and the rest of the royal family; for the name Athelinga-eig, Athelney, which for a thousand years has dignified this lonely little spot in Sedgmoor, can hardly mean anything else than the Island of the Princes.

Having constructed his fort here in Athelney, did Alfred accomplish any other works to make his men more secure from intrusion, and to enable them, at the same time, to get at their enemies more easily from their stronghold? I think an answer is supplied by Asser, in his remarks on Athelney under the year 888. "Access," he says, "can be had to it only by causeways or by a single bridge, built and lengthened out between two lofty forts; towards the western end of this bridge was erected a strong tower, of beautiful workmanship, by the command of the aforesaid King Alfred." From this it seems fair to infer† that, during his stay here, Alfred threw a bridge across the Parret at Boroughbridge, strengthened the causeway leading thence across the moors to Othery, and guarded each end of the causeway with forts, that at the mump at

* So Ethelweard says.

† Compare Proceedings; Vol. 23, Part i p. 19.

Boroughbridge being unusually handsome and strong. Observing the enemy from this convenient watch-tower, keeping them still in the neighbourhood, and preoccupied with his frequent assaults, Alfred, meanwhile, was sending messengers all over Wessex, bidding his men to meet him for one last effort, when the proper time should come.

By the middle of May the time had come. All was ready for carrying out the wise king's purpose. How it was carried out you shall hear in the short, plain narrative of the old Chronicle. But to make this short narrative more clear and satisfactory, I think we must assume : (1). That Odda and the men of Devon are not mentioned as part of Alfred's new army, because they were left, either in the stronghold of Taunton, or at Danesborough in the Quantock Hills, to guard against Guthrum's possible return to Exeter, and perhaps to feign an attack on the Danes from the south, as soon as Alfred's arrival was signalled from the Polden heights. For (2), as you will have inferred already, I think we shall also be justified in assuming, as fitting in best with all the evidence that has come down to us, and also with any reasonable plan of strategy, that the sight of Alfred's great victory of Ethandun was not Edington‡ in Wilts, but Edington on the Polden hills.

This is what the old Chronicler tells us of that eventful Whitsuntide of 878 : "Then, in the seventh week after Easter, King Alfred rode to Egbert's Stone, on the east of Selwood, and there came to meet him all the men of Somerset and the men of Wiltshire, and that portion of the men of Hampshire which was on this side of the sea, and they were joyful at his presence. The next day he went from that station to Iglea, and on the day after to Ethandun, and there he fought against the whole army, and put them to flight, and

‡ Proceedings, Vol. 21, Part 2, p. 21. Rev. C. W. Whistler argues this point in the article referred to above; and takes it for granted in his interesting story, "King Alfred's Viking."

pursued them as far as their fortress, and there he sat down fourteen days. Then the army delivered to him hostages, with many oaths that they would leave his kingdom; they also promised that their king should receive baptism, and that they accordingly fulfilled. And about three weeks after this, King Guthrum came to him, with some thirty of the principal men of his army, at Aulre, which is near Athelney, and the king (Alfred) was his godfather at baptism; and his chrismloosing was at Wedmore; and he was twelve days with the king, and he greatly honoured him and his companions with gifts." Asser tells us that Alfred, in his great battle, arranged his men in a dense phalanx; just as he had done at Ashdown; and thus they held out against the furious and repeated attacks of the Danes. He also says that Alfred, after his victory, agreed to the Danish terms, being "moved with pity" at their distress.

The immediate result of this great victory was the Treaty of Wedmore, which left the Danes their conquests north and east of the Thames and Watling Street; and reserved for Alfred all south of Thames, with London and half Mercia. This probably seems to us a very small success, but, indeed, it was all that could then be safely demanded, and Alfred never showed more true wisdom, more true devotion to his country, more of what Mr. Thomas Hughes calls his "divine patience," than when he made these moderate, conciliatory terms with his enemies, instead of driving them to desperation by insisting upon unconditional surrender. And Alfred's moderation was crowned with success, for the Treaty of Wedmore secured fifteen years of peace, during which this good king, who was indeed the father of his people, was able to carry out those domestic reforms which were so dear to him; improvements in the Navy and Militia; re-establishment of justice; codification of the laws; and the revival of education and religion.

But the ultimate results of Alfred's victory were greater

still. They were : First, the gradual Christianising and civilising of the Danish invaders, so that, in a few generations, they became one people with the English, simply adding a fresh supply of force and energy to the national character ; secondly, the gradual recovery of English predominance, so that Alfred's grandson, Athelstan, was making no vain boast when he styled himself, " King of all Britain." Therefore it is not too much to say, that the campaign of 878, which was planned and begun in this little fen-bound Athelney, did save this realm of England from barbarian conquest and a relapse into Paganism.

For us people of Somerset the name of Alfred, " the most perfect character in history," as Freeman justly calls him, naturally turns our thoughts to Athelney and the stirring events of 878. But surely no Englishman, who is acquainted with the facts, can help regarding this little mound, in the marsh lands of Somerset, as the birthplace of a new hope for the Anglo-Saxon race, and, through it, for the World at large.

The Physical Condition of Athelney in Alfred's Time.

Mr. EDWIN SLOPER then read a paper on " The Physical Condition of Athelney in the Time of King Alfred."

The Benedictine Monastery.

The Rev. E. H. BATES, rector of Puckington and hon. secretary of the Somerset Record Society, afforded some interesting information respecting the Benedictine monastery which Alfred founded at Athelney in A.D. 888.

A vote of thanks to the speakers was accorded on the motion of Colonel Bramble, seconded by Mr. C. H. Fox, J.P., of Wellington.

The Ancient Church of Boroughbridge.

Boroughbridge was then visited, and by permission of Mr. Chambers the "Mump" was ascended, and as the atmosphere was clear, very extensive and interesting views were obtained from the summit, where the ruins of the ancient church were inspected with much interest.

The Rev. E. H. BATES said the church was first mentioned in the reign of Edward VI, but the building no doubt existed from an earlier date. It was dedicated to St. Michael. An uncompleted restoration was begun about 1730. The "Mump" would not be a bad place for a kind of "memorial of England," and it would be a grand thing to have a fine monument of Alfred on that site. From that spot they could see Glastonbury, which represented King Arthur and everything connected with the bygone history of England. Then they could see Burton Steeple, put up to the memory of Sir Wm. Pynsent by a much greater man, Wm. Pitt, Earl of Chatham, and by that monument played and was brought up Wm. Pitt, the younger. Then if they turned again they saw the monument of the great Duke of Wellington on the Blackdown Hills, and thus they had represented three of the greatest names in English history.

Aller: The Baptism Place of Guthrum.

The party were next conveyed to the very picturesque village of Aller, and here they were received at the parish church of St. Andrew by the rector, the Rev. Preb. Nicholson. Much interest was shown in the ancient font in which it is believed that Guthrum, the Danish chieftain, was baptised with thirty of his followers in the year 878.

The Rev. E. H. BATES expressed a doubt as to whether the font now there was the one in which Guthrum was baptised, but said there was no doubt that Alfred's adversary was baptised at that place. He pointed out an "Alfred window"

which had been erected in the church, and which he said would serve as a reminder to everybody in years to come that Aller might rank with Athelney and other places in that neighbourhood in connection with King Alfred.

The Rev. F. W. WEAVER, F.S.A., (Hon. Gen. Sec.), thanked those who had kindly organised the excursion and those who had read papers.

Langport.

The drive was then continued to Langport, where the party partook of tea in the parish-room.

The beautiful parish church was subsequently inspected through the kindness of the vicar, the Rev. D. M. Ross, who gave an interesting description of it.

Return to Taunton.

Some of the party caught the train at Langport, and the others returned to Taunton by brake through Curry Rivel, Wrantage, and Thornfalcon. It was a lovely moonlight evening, and the drive was much enjoyed.

This was certainly one of the most interesting excursions ever promoted by the Archæological Society.