

Notices of Books.

PULPITS, LECTERNS, AND ORGANS IN ENGLISH CHURCHES, by the Rev. J. C. COX, LL.D., F.S.A. (Oxford University Press, 1915; Svo., pp. xii, 228; with 155 illustrations; price 7s. 6d. net).

There are abundant signs in the shape of books to show that at last the arts and crafts of old England are being studied to advantage. Architecture led the way, and we are now gradually discerning that the building was not only a work of beauty in itself, but also held a store of marvels of workmanship in stone, wood, metal, glass, and parchment. The senseless destruction in the sixteenth century of all outward manifestation of the beauty of holiness, and the importation of pseudo-classical imitations in the seventeenth and following century ruined the artistic life of the country. What the palmer-worm and the locust had left the canker-worm of modern restoration has too often devoured.

In the series of books dealing with church art in England, this volume, including also an account of hour-glasses and their stands, has been assigned to the veteran antiquary Dr. Cox. With the help of abundance of illustrations he has written a work which appeals very strongly to dwellers in the west country. Somersetshire has been allotted twenty-three illustrations. There is a full catalogue of the stone medieval pulpits; and the wooden one at Trull is described as "superior in design and interest to any other throughout the kingdom." It has an illustration; and another may be found as a frontispiece to vol. LIV of our *Proceedings*. There is a goodly list of Jacobean and Caroline pulpits. That at Stoke St. Gregory is illustrated on p. 125; the figure group in a panel generally taken to be the Virgin and Child appears more probably to represent the vision in the Apocalypse, XII, 1-5, as the Woman is furnished with wings and has a crown y-starred on her head.

The learned author takes a pleasure in demolishing the vulgar error that sermons were infrequent before the Reformation. We do not so easily follow him in his assertion as to a continual lack after that event. When affairs quieted down the innate love of all Englishmen for edification in their favourite beliefs elevated the sermon to a pitch which has only just been lowered. Sermons lead naturally to hour-glasses. The visitor to Pilton church in Devonshire may be startled by the weird sight of a bare arm issuant (to use an heraldic phrase) out of the pulpit, and supporting a frame for the hour-glass (p. 13). Taunton Museum preserves an hour-glass stand formerly in North Newton Church. Brancepeth is not in Devon but in Durham (p. 85); and Thurleston (p. 136) is a misprint for Thurloxton. This is an interesting and beautiful book.



THE ALFRED JEWEL.

Found near Newton Court, Somerset, in 1693.

(From "Alfred the Great," by Miss B. A. Lees, 1915.)

ALFRED THE GREAT: THE TRUTH TELLER, MAKER OF ENGLAND, 848-899, by Beatrice Adelaide Lees, sometime Tutor of Somerville College, Oxford (G. P. Putnam's Sons, the Knickerbocker Press, 1915; 8vo., pp. xv, 493, illustrated; price 10s. 6d. net).

The inclusion of King Alfred the Great among the *Heroes of the Nations* needs no apology such as appears in the preface to this volume, and in view of the close connection of the great king with Somerset at a crisis of his fortunes any book dealing with his life must appeal to members of this Society. The authoress sets out to bring together the chief results of recent historical and literary research, but in so far as regards a point of main interest to Somerset readers, the site of the battle of Ethandun, the hopes she raises are doomed to disappointment. Miss Lees admits that the only tests by which the site of a battlefield can be fixed without direct historical evidence are philological and strategic. It is clear from her "Note on the Site of the Battle of Ethandun" that she is not unaware of the weighty strategical evidence in favour of Edington on Poldens which has been got together, mainly by members of this Society.¹ Yet not the slightest attempt is made to weigh the strategical evidence in favour of the Somerset site or the evidence which makes the accepted Wiltshire site, Edington near Westbury, almost impossible for strategical reasons. This may be a clue to feminine inability to deal adequately with this aspect of the question or to the difficulty of reconciling the strategical aspect with the views of the philological authorities followed by Miss Lees. At any rate she is content to decide the question on philological grounds alone, blindly following an authority whose argument may be summed up as follows:—The evidence that the Wiltshire Edington bore the name Ethandun is incontrovertible; evidence as to any other site bearing that name is inconclusive; therefore in King Alfred's time there can only have been one place so named; therefore the Wiltshire Edington must be the site of the battle and the Ethandun of King Alfred's will.

Relying on this evidence drawn from incomplete and doubtful documents, Miss Lees has, we infer, never examined the topography of the campaign on the spot or looked across to Boroughbridge from Edington Hill on the Poldens; and though she appears to have visited Athelney and its immediate neighbourhood she falls into the common error of saying that it lies *between* Tone and Parret, though she correctly describes its position on the left bank of the former river.

This is not the place to renew a discussion of this question but

1. References are given to Dr. Clifford's paper in vol. XXII of the *Proceedings*, to the Rev. C. W. Whistler's papers in *Memorials of Old Somerset* and *The Saga-Book of the Viking Club*, vol. II, to the Rev. W. Greswell's *Story of the Battle of Edington*, and to *Early Wars of Wessex*, by A. F. Major, ed. by C. W. Whistler.

we cannot refrain from expressing surprise that Miss Lees makes not the slightest allusion to the very strong evidence in favour of the identification of Cynuit Castle with the ancient stronghold on Cannington Park, near Combe, at the mouth of the Parret. She also states positively that King Alfred bequeathed to his wife Lambourn, Wantage "and Ethandun, *the scene of his victory over Guthrum*" (the italics are ours), whereas it is almost certain that this Edington of the will was the manor of Edington, near Hungerford, adjacent to the Lambourn and Wantage manors, despite the fact that this Edington masquerades in Domesday as Eddevetone. It is the fashion, we know, to treat Domesday Book as infallible. This doubtless simplifies the study of place-names, yet it hardly justifies a historian who professes to set out the results of previous controversies in setting down as a fact a point which is certainly open to dispute.

As regards Athelney the strategical value of King Alfred's position there is not brought out. But the advantages it conferred by its situation among the vast royal domains in Somerset, where the King had the support not only of his personal following but also of the royal servants employed on the Crown lands and of the tenants of the Crown, are not overlooked, though this point would probably have been brought out even more forcibly had local authorities on the subject been consulted, *e.g.* the various volumes for which Mr. Greswell is responsible.

Besides these failures to deal fairly or fully with certain aspects of the subject, which would probably not bulk very largely in the eyes of anyone not specially interested in King Alfred's connection with Somerset, Miss Lees in our view hardly deals adequately with King Alfred as a warrior and a strategist, probably for the reasons that have led her to ignore the strategical side of the Ethandun controversy. Apart from this we have nothing but praise for her work. Chapters on "Europe" and "England before Alfred the Great" set the general European and the local situation in clear perspective and the relations between the two are brought out throughout the volume. The events of the king's life and reign are carefully and critically discussed, while chapters on the Alfredian State, Alfredian Society and Alfredian Literature do ample justice to the great king's devotion to letters and to the part he played in fostering a revival in Wessex of the arts and crafts of peace. A final chapter on "The Myth of King Alfred" traces the growth of the various legends which have clustered about the king and the varying ways in which his memory has been cherished by subsequent generations. The illustrations, drawn from various sources and illustrating various aspects of the subject, are excellent and excellently chosen.

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