

Inaugural Address.

I HAVE thought that a few remarks upon the ancient city of Bristol, in which we are holding our present meeting, and particularly as to the great progress which it has made during the last 50 years, or during the reign of her most gracious Majesty, would be acceptable to a Society which has done the Chief Magistrate of Bristol the honour of selecting him as President for 1887.

Bristol, as you are no doubt aware, is one of the few places in England which are counties in themselves. But in common parlance it is considered as being partly in Gloucestershire and partly in Somersetshire, and we are proud of our connection with these two counties—two of the most fertile and beautiful in England. The largest part of Bristol lies to the north of the Avon, and is therefore in Gloucestershire; and this portion of Bristol contains about a third part of the population of that county. But the Ward of Redcliff, and the large and rapidly increasing suburb of Bedminster, lie to the south of the Avon, and therefore in Somersetshire, and contain in that part of Bristol a population equal to that of the largest city in the county. We are connected with the northern county in various ways, notably in ecclesiastical matters the Sees of Gloucester and Bristol being still united, although an Act of Parliament has been passed which, when the provisions are carried out, will restore to Bristol the undivided See of which she was deprived in the year 1836. On the other hand, the visit of the Lord Chief Justice of England, and Mr. Justice Cave, with which we are to be honoured next

week, would show that in the administration of justice Bristol is considered as part of the Western Circuit, and connected with Somersetshire. Doubtless the fact of Bristol being a separate county is in this instance taken into consideration.

Both in Somersetshire and Gloucestershire there is much to show that the Romans were well acquainted with this part of England during their occupation of the country. The remains of Roman villas in various parts of both counties—their numerous camps spread over the neighbourhood—the recent discoveries at Bath—leave no doubt upon the point. The two counties appear to have been the limit of the invasion of England by our Saxon forefathers to the south and west. In Somersetshire most probably took place the final contest between Alfred and the Danes; and this county must have formed an important part of the kingdom of Wessex, which, after many struggles, obtained the ascendancy in the Saxon heptarchy.

Of the part taken by Bristol in these important events there are, I am afraid, no authentic records. But there is very great presumptive evidence that it was an important place during Roman, Saxon, and Danish times at least.

Its position at the junction of the Avon and the Frome, the various notices in different writers which would seem to allude to it, coins in existence which were struck in Bristol, all seem to point to this fact; and it must have taken many centuries to form such a community as Bristol is found to have been soon after the Norman Conquest, as it is only in the nineteenth century that places like Melbourne and Chicago can be developed in a generation.

The position which Bristol must have held at the time of the Conquest is shown in the struggle which took place about seventy years afterwards between Stephen, who had seized the Crown of England, and the Empress Maud, the rightful heiress. Bristol was the head-quarters of the latter and her relation and great supporter, the Earl of Gloucester;

and during this contest it appeared at one time probable that England might have been divided in two parts, with London and Bristol as the respective capitals of the eastern and western portions. Again, during the invasion of Ireland, which took place shortly after the reign of Henry II, the city of Dublin was actually made over to Bristol by the King as a dependency ;—of what kind it is perhaps now difficult to determine, but the fact at least would show the importance of Bristol at the time.

From various historical accounts of the part taken by Bristol in the affairs of this country—particularly the large contributions to the national fleets—this city and port may justly lay claim to have been the second in the Empire. There are accounts of the visits of many of the Kings and Queens of England to Bristol, all showing, by the way in which they were entertained, the importance of the place.

During the Civil War, the possession of Bristol was considered to be of great importance to the contending parties. The capture of the city by Prince Rupert, in 1643, was very important to the cause of his Royal uncle, and its surrender by the Prince two years afterwards was a correspondingly heavy blow to the Royal fortunes. The original articles of surrender to Prince Rupert, in 1643, are to be seen at the Council House. In the account which Macaulay gives of the state of England soon after the Restoration, he mentions Bristol as second to London.

Up to this time Bristol had been principally confined between its walls, and consisted mainly of the four streets, of Corn Street, Broad Street, High Street, and Wine Street, with the Castle at the end of the latter ; and also of a small extension towards the Marsh, now Queen Square, and the suburbs of Redcliff, Thomas, and Temple Parishes, south of the Avon ; *the part left uncoloured in the centre of the map annexed.*

After the destruction of the Castle, ordered to be demolished by Cromwell in 1654, the city began to extend beyond the

SNEYD PARK



ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS

COLLEGE CLOSE

Richmond Hill

CANON'S MARSH

ASHTON PARK

BOROUGHASHTON

PEOPLES PARK

CATTLE MARKET

ST PHILIPS MARSH

KNOWLE

walls. Denmark Street and Hanover Street allude to Queen Anne's Consort, Prince George of Denmark, and the house of Hanover; while the names of Trinity and Unity Streets, in the neighbourhood of St. Augustine's Back and College Green, were most probably taken from the struggles between High and Low Church in the early part of the eighteenth century. The city continued to extend, and to climb the hills by which the ancient city is surrounded, until, at the commencement of the reign of Queen Victoria, in 1837,—fifty years ago—*it had attained the dimensions which are coloured blue upon the map.* I have a personal remembrance of the boundaries of Bristol at that time. It included the Hotwells, which had been a fashionable health resort, but which had then nearly lost its reputation; then passing by Harley Place, Richmond Terrace, Richmond Hill, the top of Park Street, the Royal Fort, Clarence Place, the end of Montague or St. James's Parade, Bishop Street (St. Paul's), to Lawford's Gate and Cheese Lane, (St. Philip's); while there were very few houses on the Bedminster side of the New Cut, except the streets of Bedminster itself. The Royal Agricultural Show was held in 1842 in fields at the back of the Victoria Rooms, which had just been erected; the site is about a mile from the present boundary of dwelling houses in the city. Just previous to this time the writer remembers to have seen a balloon ascend from about where St. Matthew's Church now stands, then a large open space called Mother Pugsley's Fields, from an affecting incident which took place during the Civil War. St. Matthew's Church was built soon after, and is now the centre of a large population on every side.

To those at all acquainted with the city at present, its great expansion must be apparent. *It is shown by the colour red upon the map;* and it would appear that the area covered by dwelling houses has more than doubled during the last 50 years. The increase in the population of Bristol (in 1881

about 60,000) has kept pace with this large extension of area. In 1837 the population of the borough numbered about 120,000; at the census of 1881 it was 206,000; and probably at present the number would be about 220,000—while the population of the four recently constituted boroughs into which Bristol has been divided, and which represent mainly its extensions beyond the former limits of the borough, may be taken to be more than 250,000. While the population has thus increased, the number of churches and other places of public worship has also correspondingly increased, so as to retain for Bristol its ancient name as the “City of Churches.”

In the year 1839, the rateable value of property in Bristol was estimated at rather more than £370,000; it has steadily increased during the 50 years to 1887, and it now amounts to £975,000, or nearly three times the amount at the earlier period.

As to the increase in the commerce of the city during this period, the tonnage of vessels entering the port during the year 1837 was about 410,000 tons. In the year ending April, 1847, it was 546,753 tons; 1867, 819,710 tons; 1887, 1,301,805 tons; or an increase of more than three times the tonnage in 1837.

It is true that the great increase in the cotton and other manufactures in the North of England and South of Scotland have caused other ports to surpass Bristol in trade and population; but the foregoing facts will show that, whatever may have taken place elsewhere, Bristol at least has not been asleep; and the recent increase in dock accommodation will probably cause her unrivalled position as a port to be still further developed. Although Bristol can no longer claim to be the second city in the Empire, yet if a line were drawn to the south-west of Liverpool, Birmingham, and London, leaving more than half of England and Wales, there is no place in that large district that can at all compete with her in importance.

It would take the population of several of the largest towns in that portion of England to equal that of Bristol.

I have shown from the foregoing that while the area of inhabited houses in Bristol, and the population contained therein, has more than doubled in the last 50 years, the rateable value of property in the city, and the tonnage of vessels entering the port have increased during the same period to a much greater extent.

Since writing the foregoing, in fact, only yesterday, I met with a *History of Bristol*, by William Hunt, published in the present year. In glancing through its pages, I noticed that the last chapter in the book is headed, "Decline and Revival." Now this, I venture to say, is altogether a misnomer. There has been no decline in the population and trade of Bristol during the last 200 years—nothing that could give just cause for such a description. Our rate of progression may have been slow as compared with Liverpool or Glasgow, but it has been constant. I think a considerable increase will be found in Queen Anne's reign over the times of the Commonwealth. In the middle of the 18th century we had progressed beyond the commencement. During the great French war we were further advanced in population and trade than in 1750. And at the commencement of the reign of Queen Victoria we had considerably advanced in both respects beyond 1800. And, if I had time to do so, I think I should be able to show that the progress was steady, if slow, in each decade since the time of Prince Rupert and Cromwell. What our improvement has been during the last 50 years may be learnt from the preceding pages; and I have only now to thank you for the kind attention you have afforded me, and to hope that your present visit to our ancient city may leave nothing but pleasurable remembrances behind it.

The Rev. Prebendary SCARTH moved a vote of thanks to the Mayor for his address, in which he had so clearly sketched

out the rise and progress of this most interesting city. He himself had watched the progress of Bristol for half a century, and had seen the great improvements which had taken place. He remembered the time before Victoria Street was made, when St. Mary Redcliff and the Cathedral were in their original state. He was glad to note the improvements in them, and he trusted that the improvement of the Cathedral would soon be completed, and that we should shortly have a bishop of our own, for in his opinion it was a great mistake to connect Bristol with Gloucester.

Mr. J. G. L. BULLEID seconded the motion, and further thanked the Mayor for presenting the Members with a map showing the limits of Ancient and Modern Bristol.

Dr. ALFORD wished to add his thanks to the Mayor, and to express his pleasure at returning to Bristol, which was his *alma mater*.

The MAYOR briefly returned thanks, and said he had always felt a deep interest in the welfare of the city.