

The President's Address.

I BEG to thank you for the honour you have conferred upon me by electing me your President, but I must ask you not to expect anything worthy to be dignified by the name of an address. Though taking a great interest in the Society's meetings,—and especially in this one,—I can only be a listener and a learner; and I have not the power or ability to impart to you any knowledge on archæological subjects. But in proportion to this inability and lack of power on my part, is the measure and extent of the favour you have conferred upon me.

This is the first time the Society has met at Minehead,—you met at Dunster thirty-four years ago, but have not, I believe, come west of that point until now,—and in my own name, and in the name of the inhabitants, I bid you a hearty welcome.

Perhaps I may be allowed to add that we feel proud, and thankful to Mr. Ponsford and other gentlemen, that we are able to welcome you in this fine room, on the first occasion of its being used since its completion.

This district does not abound in subjects of archæological interest,—at any rate, subjects of interest which are the works of man,—but I hope you will find some compensation in the natural beauty of the scenery. And this seems to be a general rule by which this compensating balance is maintained; for if we take Switzerland and the Alps, Scotland, or the lake district of Cumberland and Westmoreland, we do not find subjects of archæological interest so frequently as in districts of less natural beauty. It seems as if the works of man were silenced and subdued by the greater works of Nature. The more prosaic interpretation would be to say it depended upon the relative fertility of the soil and richness of the country. You must not, then, be disappointed if we are not an exception

to this rule, and your President and his native country are uninteresting.

We must be thankful in this district for small mercies, and we may claim to be rich in the number of what are called manor houses—houses of considerable importance, but none, perhaps, of any particular architectural features or interest. But the number is rather beyond what is found in other districts, as far as my experience goes, which is not far.

If we take a district about twenty-four miles long, parallel with the Bristol Channel, and about three miles wide, there are twenty-one of these houses at least, probably more; many of them now farm houses. There is Bratton Court, for one; the Parks, Minehead; then Dunster, Lower Marsh, Marshwood, Withycombe, Sandhill, Kentsford, Aller, Orchard Wyndham, Combe Sydenham, Binham, Crowcombe, Saint Audries, East Quantoxhead, Bickham, and Croydon, near Timberscombe, and one or two more I cannot now recollect. I cannot attach much importance to this, but it shows that the custom in those days was more wholesome, and people were not so fond of congregating in towns, and property must have been more sub-divided.

There is another thing which strikes me as peculiar to this neighbourhood—the large extent to which oak was used instead of stone. I do not mean that we have the timbered houses of Shropshire or Cheshire; though there are some instances of that, and I have found in old cottages the roof supported by side timbers reaching nearly to the ground. But I mean that oak was used as if it was stone. There is an instance of this just opposite this hall, where the tracery and mullions of an old window are in oak, and there are many other examples.

Masons and workers in stone seem not to have flourished here, for with the exception of Cleeve Abbey, and perhaps Porlock Church, their work is inferior. And besides this use of oak, we find plaster where you would expect to find stone;

chiefly in mantelpieces. There is one of these close to the Feathers Hotel at Minehead, one at the Luttrell Arms, Dunster, and at the Castle; and several interesting ones at East Quantoxhead.

But if stone masons did not flourish in this part of the country, wood carvers did, and there are many rich specimens of their work in the rood-screens, bench ends, and oak chests. In Minehead Church you will find a very fine chest, with the arms of Fitzjames, Vicar of Minehead in 1483, and afterwards Bishop of London. There are many more to be found, but none of so early a date.

I have only now again to thank you for the honour you have done me, and to ask you to accept my apologies for my deficiency.

At the conclusion a vote of thanks to the President for his very interesting address was passed, on the motion of Mr. H. G. MOYSEY, seconded by Mr. E. CHISHOLM-BATTEN.
