

A Photographic Survey of Somerset.

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WITHIN the last year or two the archæologists, naturalists, and photographers of Warwickshire have organized a photographic survey of their county; and their example has been followed in certain other localities. The purpose of such a survey is to secure a permanent record of such features as are liable to change or destruction; namely buildings, special features in landscape, phenomena of geology and natural history, and so forth.

I use the expression "permanent record" advisedly, not referring to old-fashioned photographic pictures, which are well known to be of the most transient character. But photographs printed by the platinum process will probably last beyond any other kind of picture, either printed or painted; and even negatives on glass may be expected to last almost indefinitely if treated with care.

In the present assembly it is unnecessary to press the claims of Somerset, as affording for photographic record material equal in interest with that of almost any county. I will only ask that if, as is probable, you consider a photographic survey desirable, you will do all you can to make it feasible.

It will be well for me to enumerate a few of the features to which the survey should be specially directed. First and fore-

most in Somerset are the Church towers. A complete set of photographs of these, whose number is reckoned by hundreds, would be as characteristic an architectural collection as I can think of; and, if published at some future time, it would prove a mine of wealth to the architects of coming generations. These towers from time to time come under the lamentable necessity of restoration: and when such necessity occurs, a photographic record of the tower in its prime would be an invaluable guide to the repairer.

Our Churches present other features for photography beside the towers: for instance, the stone pulpits, ancient fonts, wood-carving, and peculiar local forms of window-tracery. When all our Churches have been supplied with stained glass of eccentric design, with obtrusive reredoses, or what not; and when their interiors generally are reduced to the conventional nineteenth century pattern; then it will be instructive to refer to the photographs and learn whether the taste of this century was better or worse than that of the seventeenth and eighteenth.

Then there are public monuments to be recorded: also houses, both mansions and the humbler buildings on our streets and waysides. I have lately visited two fine old mansions, Nailsea Court and Chelvey Court, and secured photographs of such portions as are left of them: but alas! these houses are left to the owls and rats; and the panelling and wood carving has been stript from their walls and sent way,—perhaps to Stratford-on-Avon or to Wardour Street, to be hatched up into mediæval furniture. Would that I could have obtained records of their appearance before their vandalism!

There are several interesting old towns and villages in the county whose aspect we should record. The march of civilization leads many a country place to think itself nothing if not up to date; and with this supposition it conscientiously removes the evidences of its former history. As an instance

I may mention my native town, Shepton Mallet. This *was* one of the quaintest towns in England: but the prosperity attending the development of a new industry has led to a sad destruction of old buildings to make room for newer and showier ones. Thus, the old *Black Swan Inn*, a striking feature in the market place, has been removed to give place to a hideous new public house on the gin-palace model. Again, the Shambles¹ date from about the year 1400, and are about the only specimens of their kind remaining in England: yet the people are yearning to destroy them, because they are so disgracefully old, and so dreadfully in the way of the public houses. I fear that even their beautiful Market Cross would have to come down if trade could be improved by the change. I rejoice in having secured careful photographs of all the features mentioned, before any destruction was commenced.

But buildings are not the only things that are being swept away. Natural features are being destroyed also; and this is far worse. If we destroy a fine building we may perchance build another equally good; but a natural curiosity destroyed is irreplaceable. Unless we obtain permanent photographic records of such places as the Cheddar Cliffs, future generations will know of them only by name; for they are being surely though gradually removed by quarrying. There is nothing in the laws of England to prevent any man quarrying on his own land; and if the land-owners at Cheddar can make money by selling the cliffs at so much a cart-load, they will not hesitate to do it. The same terrible curse, quarrying, has wrought almost greater havoc on two of our other limestone gorges, Burrington and Backwell. The exquisite littlecombe of Backwell is already almost ruined, and within a year or two may not have one cliff left. Huge quarries also disfigure the most beautiful hill in the county—Dulcot Hill by Wells.

¹ Benches sheltered by a roof, used for the sale of meat, etc., in the market-place. Anglo-Saxon SCAMEL; from Latin SCAMELLUM, diminutive of SCAMNUM, a bench.—See Skeat's *Dictionary*.

There is danger that, even if not entirely quarried away, the hill will at all events be deprived of its beauty of outline.

We should therefore secure photographs of these natural features while yet a chance remains. There are other very transient geological phenomena to which our attention should also be directed ; namely, the formations exposed from time to time in quarries, railway and road-cuttings, and the interior of mines. These things are usually revealed only to be destroyed, and unless an organized vigilance is directed towards them, the photographer's opportunity is lost. It is of particular interest that fossils, especially large animals and plants, should be photographed *in situ*, before they have been subjected to the risk of breakage in extraction.

In the region of botany the subjects for photography would be such as curious plants and trees, also forest scenes.

Lastly, there are many articles of antiquarian interest of which photographic record would be valuable ; for example, historical documents, books, seals, portraits, pottery, jewellery, and other works of art.

If we decide to undertake the survey, how shall we set to work? There are two methods, of which the Warwickshire one shall be described first. It consists in marking out the county into areas, and deputing two or more workers to each area, to photograph systematically every suitable object within it. The workers present the photographic "negatives" to the Central Committee, who preserve them as archives. From the negatives prints are made of the most permanent kind attainable, and these likewise are added to the archives. Of course every photograph is systematically stored, and noted in the catalogue for reference when required. All the collection may be placed at the service of suitable persons who require them for research.

The other method consists in each member of the Survey devoting himself to the recording of those particular subjects which he is most competent to record, wherever in the county

they may be. He either gives his results unreservedly to the Central Committee or lends the negatives, that prints may be taken for the archives. If he does not like to part with the negatives in his lifetime, he may and should bequeath them to the Survey by his will. The rest of the working of this method would be the same as in that of Warwickshire.

Something may be said in favour of each method. The first would ensure *a greater number* of objects being photographed: but the second would produce *a higher quality* in the pictures. The man who can take the most judicious view of a geological peculiarity may be incompetent to select the most desirable features and points of view in architecture. Probably a combination of both methods would lead to the best results; but this is a question to be decided in Committee.

In addition to the work already mentioned, the Survey should endeavour to acquire any negatives and photographic pictures which were taken years ago of objects which have since changed. Many valuable old negatives are in existence; but they could only be obtained by purchase, and some could only be discovered by diligent inquiry.

How shall the expenses of the Survey be defrayed? Firstly, each person who joins the Survey must be willing to give his time and materials, feeling that his sacrifice is made in a good cause. Then a subscription fund is necessary for defraying the expenses incident to printing, storing, and cataloguing; also for the purchase of old photographs. To this fund it is to be hoped that the Somerset Archæological and Natural History Society will be able to contribute.

I should be glad to receive the names and opinions of all who are willing to co-operate with me in the survey. Names will also be kindly received by Mr. Bidgood, The Museum, Taunton. It is not necessary that all members of the Survey should be photographers. Enthusiasts in archæology or science can greatly assist the Survey, even though they themselves may not use a camera.

Finally,—it may be possible to conduct the Survey as an entirely independent organization: but nevertheless the work could be far better carried out under the auspices of this Society; that is to say, if it stood in the relation of a *section* to the Society. This would be beneficial not only to the Photographic Survey, but also to the parent Society; for the latter would profit by the great collection of historical material. The photographic pictures would become the property of the Society, and would greatly increase its resources in the future.

