

The President's Address.

Sir EDWARD FRY, who was cordially received, then delivered his Presidential Address. He said, "You are all familiar with the fact that the objects of this Society are twofold; it embraces Archæology and Natural History. I am rather inclined to think that the latter department has been less favoured in our researches. The Society has not done so much for Natural History as for Archæology. If we look back to the volumes of the last few years, we see, as the chief contribu-

1. *Proc.* xiv., ii. 94.

tion in Natural History, Mr. Murray's Flora of the county, which gives the localities of the flowering plants of the districts and divides Somerset into ten districts, separated more or less by natural conditions. But the work is confined almost to the flowering plants. It is much to be desired that work of a similar kind should be undertaken in reference to the cryptogamic flora of the county. I may mention in this connection that Mr. E. C. Horrell, of Copleston Road, Denmark Hill, is at work on the subject of the Geographical Distribution of the Mosses in Great Britain, and that if any students of that branch of botany would communicate to him the results of their labours in this county, they would be helping forward a good work.

“Turning from Natural History to the other branch of the Society's work, Archæology, I think that the most interesting discovery in our own county of late years has been that made in the very remarkable British village in the immediate vicinity of Glastonbury, where for years past interesting investigations have been carried on, which have brought to light a kind of settlement, I believe unique in the country, and also some of the most beautiful work of Celtic art found in England. I have this morning received a letter from Mr. Bulleid, who directed the labours which have been carried on in the village, and he said it had occurred to him that during the meeting of the Society the question might be asked with respect to the lake village, and if the excavations were to be opened this year. Owing to professional work, he would not be able to attend to the excavations now, but he hopes at some future time to continue the explorations. We regret that he could not carry on the investigations this year, but we shall look forward to the completion of the investigations in future years.

There is a subject which attracted the attention of the Society some years ago, upon which I should like to say a few words,—I mean the project of completing and publishing a

thorough and exhaustive history of the county of Somerset. Forms were sent round to many members of the Society, suggesting that they should undertake particular districts or parishes, so that they should make a more complete work than that of Collinson. Collinson's work was that of a comparatively young man, and is, notwithstanding all its inaccuracies and deficiencies, of great merit. We have the advantage of an Index to the work, for which we are indebted to our Honorary Secretary (the Rev. F. W. Weaver), and the Rev. E. H. Bates. In considering whether it were possible to undertake a work of this sort, I consulted some friends in Northumberland, who are engaged in the great history of that county at the present time. That work will, it is computed, occupy twelve large quarto volumes, four of which have already been issued. Those four volumes have cost £4,725, so that the figure for the completion will be a large one. A guarantee fund was formed in the county, and they had to meet a deficiency of £1,500 in respect to the first four volumes. In Somersetshire, with rents as they are, and land depreciated, we should hardly be able to undertake such a work. I think, on the whole, that it had better not be attempted at present. We shall do better to encourage local enterprise before we attempt a great county history. It is a pleasure to know that there are agencies going forward which, if they continue, will furnish materials when our successors shall undertake the great work. We must be content to play the part of David, and leave Solomon to put together the materials we may have collected in order to build the structure. First we have the Somersetshire Record Society. We have heard that some people are dissatisfied with what was published by that Society. I think that there is no cause for such a feeling. We must not expect that the publications will all be like the Waverley Novels, and I hope there will be a large subscription for what is issued. Then we have the "Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries," which contain much useful information: and

lastly, we have individual labourers in particular districts. Our friend, Mr. Master, has published interesting monographs on Backwell and Flax Bourton; Mr. Wadmore has done the same for Barrow Gurney, and Mr. Byrehmore for Tickenham. It is understood that Prebendary Hancock is at work on Minehead, Prebendary Coleman on Cheddar, and Mr. Chadwyck-Healey on Porlock and four or five adjoining parishes. These labours are worthy of imitation, and if this kind of work be spread over the country, we shall in time have the materials for a thorough county history.

“It is worthy of consideration whether a county history of quite a different kind to that to which I have referred might not even now be undertaken with success. I mean one which should not merely consist of the sum of a number of parochial histories, but should deal with the county as a unit. If we look back to the history of this county, it furnishes many points of interest: we might begin with considering the traces of Christianity during the Roman period, then how Christianity came at a later date to the West Saxons, not through Canterbury and Augustine, but through Burgundy and Birinus. Then we look at the period of King Alfred, for we know that Somersetshire had its distinct part in the great wars of Alfred, in the times which followed his flight to Athelney. Then, coming down to a much later period, we arrive at Monmouth's rebellion. We need not necessarily have a work of great magnitude or research, but one which would bring together points of interest in the county as a county, and not deal with parochial matters. I commend that work to anyone who has leisure and the necessary qualification.

“I have referred to the connection of King Alfred with our county. I am desirous that we should be on the alert, and that Somersetshire should take its due part in the forthcoming celebration of the one thousandth year of his death. It was in Somerset that Alfred, in the period of his extreme need, took refuge and found support. The flight to Athelney and

his hiding there was a very interesting epoch in King Alfred's life, certainly it was a crisis in his military life. Was it a crisis in his moral life as well? By some authentic Alfred's flight to Athelney has been regarded as a mere strategic movement. But there is a tradition, which finds support in Asser, as his work has come down to us, that Alfred fled because he was deserted by his friends and his Court—and that there was something like a revolt of his people, due to his neglect of his royal duties soon after his accession to the throne. Possibly the vast reputation which Alfred's later career produced may have led some historians to slur over an event which was extremely probable in a young man called to the throne, and which scarcely reflects any dishonour on his character, whilst his recovery showed of what mettle he was. Alfred's departure from Athelney was due very largely to the action of Somerset men who joined him in his march against the Danes. We are told that *all* the men of Somerset, the men of Dorset, and part of the men of Hampshire met together at Egbert's stone, and marched from Athelney across the country, spending a night at Iglea,—probably Clay Hill, and then they attacked the Danes on the encampment of the chalk hills near Westbury. Somerset also had its full share in another great event of Alfred's life, for the peace with the Danes was made at Wedmore. Then again, the monasteries of Banwell and Congresbury were given by Alfred to his friend and literary associate, the Welsh monk, Asser. Thus we have in the county of Somerset most interesting points of contact with the life of our great king. Such local associations we are, in my opinion, bound to cherish. Let me remind you of the characteristic and, as I think, the noble words of Dr. Johnson in his account of his visit to Iona: 'To abstract,' he said, 'the mind from all local emotion would be impossible, if it were endeavoured, and would be foolish, if it were possible. Whatever draws us from the power of our senses; whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the

present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings. Far from me and from my friends be such frigid philosophy, as may conduct us indifferent and unmoved over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery, or virtue. That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona.'

"Antiquarian pursuits then, if rightly followed, are not mere idle amusements of an idle hour : on the contrary they tend to remind us that we are citizens of no mean country : they help us to estimate rightly the grandeur of that inheritance which is ours as the heirs of all the ages : they not only adorn, but they strengthen and elevate our lives. '*Abeunt Studia in Mores.*'"

Mr. DUNCAN SKRINE proposed a vote of thanks to Sir Edward Fry for his admirable and interesting address. He was glad that the address had been of so practical a character, for he thought that they sometimes attempted too much and attained no result.

The Rev. A. R. CARTWRIGHT seconded the resolution, which was carried with acclamation.

The meeting then terminated.