

The Presidential Address.

The PRESIDENT then delivered his address. He said :

Allow me, first of all, to thank you for the honour which you have done me in electing me as your President at this Meeting, and to give you all most cordial welcome. I realise that I am in the chair because I happen to be residing in the neighbourhood, for I have no claim as an archæologist, nor do I know much about the objects of antiquarian interest around me. Although I am not a working bee, I enjoy, as you do, the honey which the archæologists gather for our delight, and I trust that many of our members, by the Papers which they will read, will make up for my deficiency.

Our President last year, the Dean of Wells, referred; in his very interesting address, to the excavations in the Forum of Rome. A few months ago I paid a visit to that most interesting of all cities, both to the historian and to the archæologist. The excavators are still at work, and even since I left Rome, prehistoric tombs have been found by Commandatore Boni beneath the pavement in the Forum, containing skeletons of children and adults, with votive offerings at their feet. In one tomb, supposed to date back to 1200 B.C., probably that

of a young girl, tiny silver rings, an iron bracelet, and fragments of copper were found. A number of subterranean passages, supposed to have been constructed in connection with the public games in the Forum, have also been discovered. We had the pleasure of listening, in Rome, to two lectures by Professor Lanciani, one on the Palatine, and one at the Baths of Caracalla. In one of them he told us that before long there would be abundant evidence to prove the traditional history of Rome for at least 800 years B.C.—to the time of Romulus, thus confuting the views of some modern historians, who have maintained that there was little reliable history before the date of the Punic Wars.

Here let us congratulate ourselves that the cult of the archæologist is not a new one. We have an illustrious predecessor in the Emperor Augustus, who, as Professor Lanciani told us, was accustomed to superintend excavations in the Campagna, and to collect the spoils to enrich his museum in the Imperial Palace.

But Rome, after all, carries us back a comparatively short distance in the history of the human race. Of Egypt we may say that “the footprints of an elder race are there.” Her records, as we all know, prove a high degree of civilization 2,000 years or more before the patriarchs went down into Egypt to buy corn. Assyria is now telling us the story, not indeed of her birth, but of her mature age, some five millenniums ago. The code of laws of Chamurabi, Amraphel of the Book of Genesis, in cuneiform characters on stone has been deciphered and translated into English and other languages. We have also the Babylonian record of the deluge, and bas-reliefs in stone of many kings of that distant period, including Chamurabi himself. Assyria had her Domesday books, if we may so call the imperishable record of her bricks, with details as minute as in our own Domesday. One of these, the oldest known survey of Charran (Mesopotamia), has recently been translated into English by our eminent Assyriologist, the

Rev. C. W. Johns, of Cambridge. The survey is also a census, containing minute details with regard to families, properties, holdings, arable land, vineyards, number of vines, orchards, crops cultivated, population, town dwellers, serfs, sheep, cattle, goats, horses, camels, etc., and also the names of the many divinities worshipped.

But we are not assembled on the plains of Bab-el or at Shushan the Palace, nor on the banks of the Nile, nor at Mykenæ, Knossos, Rome or Pompeii, but in the old town of Chard, in the county of Somerset,

Laudabunt alii claram Rhodon aut Mitylenen
Aut Epheson bimariseve Corinthi

* * * * *

Sunt quibus unum opus est intacta Palladis urbem
Carmine perpetuo celebrare.

Our *unum opus*, our genial task, which I hope will afford much pleasure and interest, is to explore this neighbourhood, visit the beautiful churches, whose walls, to quote from an eloquent passage of Ruskin, have been "washed with the lava tide of humanity," pausing perhaps for a moment in the silent graveyards, where "the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep," and to learn from our expert archæologists the record of the past, illustrated as it is on stone or by documents.

Somerset can boast of no clay tablets or cylinders, no baked bricks with their imperishable record. We have no portraiture in stone of the old Somersetæ warriors, no beautiful terracotta bas-reliefs such as those found at Susa, representing in blue, brown and yellow, as vivid as if they had come from the pottery but yesterday, Persian kings, priests and soldiers.

Tempus edax, homo edacior, but we have to be grateful that many invaluable documents, including the Saxon Chronicle, and our Domesday Book, have escaped the ravages of time, and the destroying hand of man, and that there are many old manuscripts in existence which have still to be brought to light by antiquaries of the future.

Domesday, the great inquest of 1085, undertaken for fiscal purposes by William of Normandy, was executed with wonderful rapidity within two years.

Will the great inquest of this year of grace 1903, instigated by Mr. Chamberlain, be as thorough and as satisfactory to its originator?

A few extracts relating to places in this neighbourhood, taken from the Survey of the South Western Counties, now in Exeter Cathedral Library, and from the great Exchequer Domesday in the Record Office, may be of interest.

Chard, Cerdre, was in the Episcopal Fief of Giso, Episcopus Wellensis (who held the land in the time of King Edward).

There were eight hides and one mill, yielding thirty pence and twenty-four capri (goats).

Winesham, Winsham, contains ten hides and two mills, yielding twenty shillings, one swineherd, paying twelve pigs.

Whitestanton, Stantuna, had to pay a rent of four blomæ ferri.

Cricket Malherbe was so called as being held by the family of De Malherbe, the lineal heirs of Drogo, the Domesday tenant.

With regard to Cricket—Cruca—the entry in the Exeter Domesday is as follows:—

“This Manor paid in dues to the Royal Manor of South Petherton, six sheep with their lambs, and each freeman paid one bloom of iron in the time of King Edward, but after Turstin received the land from the Count (of Mortain) these dues were not paid to the King’s Manor.”

From the Exchequer Domesday Book we learn that “the Count of Mortain holds of the King Cruche and Turstin holds of him, and Syrewald held it in the time of King Edward. There is land for five ploughs, of this land there are in the demesne four Hides and three Carucates and two Serfs, and six Villeins, and five Borders (cottagers) with three ploughs.

“There is a Mill yields 12 shillings and 1½ acres of meadow.

There is Wood, 7 Quarantines long, and 2 Quarantines broad, it was worth 4 pounds, but now 100 shillings."

The Count Robert of Mortain, brother of the Conqueror, held nearly all Cornwall, and land in nineteen counties. On one of his manors he erected the Castle of Montacute.

The term bloom is still used in iron-works to denote a mass of iron from the puddling furnace, which has been roughly forged into a ball-like form. It would be interesting to know whence the *blomæ ferri* were procured, and what has become of the goats that used to caper on the Somerset hills.

Amongst the most interesting historical associations with this part of Somerset are those connected with Charles I and "King" Monmouth, and with Charles II, some of the villages on the Dorsetshire side of the Axe treasuring the memory of the flight of the King. Charles I was twice in Chard, on July 24th, 1644, when he lodged at the house of Mr. Bancroft, a London merchant, and again on September 23rd, with ten thousand horse and seventeen pieces of artillery. On the 20th of the month the King dined at Lord Pawlett's, at Hinton St. George. Chard had bitterly to rue the day when, in 1685, Monmouth marched through Chard, for did not Jefferies hang some twelve or more of his citizens after the Bloody Assize? In connection with Monmouth I may quote an interesting entry in 1685, in the Registers of the Church at Membury, on the Devonshire side of the border, which we are intending to visit to-day: "John Lyd and Anne Diskett (?) were maryed by Vicar Crabb the 11th June, the very day the traytor Monmouth and his rebels landed at lyme regis the weddings were then out, and the priest would wear no surplice a great irregularity, if not the Infallible signe of a phanaticke, similis? simili gaudet."¹

Such simple records as those in a parish register are full of

(1). The Membury Church Registers, part i, 1637 to 1686, have been transcribed by Mr. Robert Cornish, and published by Mr. E. Snell, Axminster.

interest. How vividly do they recall the scenes at the font : the naming of the little stranger ; the youth and maiden pledging their troth before the altar ; and the last scene of all, when player after player makes his exit from life's stage.

The chief aim of our Society is to illustrate the history of the past, but it also calls our attention to the lessons which Nature, in her various forms of beauty and life, so prodigally provides for our enjoyment.

Unlike Paracelsus, in his pride, who

“Saw no use in the past, only a scene
Of degradation, ugliness and tears,
The record of disgraces best forgotten,
A sullen page in human chronicle
Fit to erase,”

we, of “after days,” will not

“reject the past,
Big with deep warnings of the proper tenure
By which we have the earth : for us the present
Shall have distinct and trembling beauty, seen
Beside that past's own shade, when in relief
Its brightness shall stand out.”

We are, all of us, I am sure, deeply interested in the history of the lives, the arts, the religion and culture of those who, on this planet of ours, in the distant past played their little parts in the great drama of humanity, and I hope I shall be excused for not having confined my remarks within the limits of the county.

The DEAN OF WELLS proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Fry for his interesting address, remarking that the President had taken them to Egypt and Assyria, the ancient cradles of civilization, and to comparatively modern Rome and Italy. He would only say that during his twelve years' knowledge of the Society, he had never found elsewhere, not even in Bristol, such a large and attentive audience as was now present. It was pleasant to know that the people of Chard and Cricket St. Thomas had such good neighbours as Mr. and Mrs. Fry.

The Mayor of Chard (Ald. S. H. DENING) seconded the

vote, and said that locally they were proud to have given the Society such a good President, and the Society was to be congratulated on securing Mr. Fry's services.

The motion having been carried very cordially, Mr. FRY acknowledged the compliment paid him.

This concluded the business meeting.