

Reviews.

THE MANOR OF MEDMENHAM, by Arthur H. Plaisted. 8vo., pp. xvi., 434. Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co., London. 15s. net.

One of the most interesting of village histories, entitled "The Manor of Medmenham," has lately been published by Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co., London. It is a work upon which an immense amount of labour has been expended. The beginning of the story reaches far back into the Stone Age, when the first settlement of primitive man took place in South Britain. From that time the scenes gradually unfold and change until through many vicissitudes we reach the present day. By well-selected quotations from many original documents, combined with tables of genealogy, the descent of landed estates in the neighbourhood is traced in continuous succession from the first land owners right down to the modern possessors of the property. Much of the information in this volume has been recovered from treasuries of rural lore hitherto untouched by any historian, and these facts now appear in print for the first time. In telling the story the writer has endeavoured to show how the several characters have contributed to the movements of the wider field of drama, because the records of our villages and towns supply the illustrations and furnish the atmosphere, without which the abstractions of general history fail to impress the imagination.

The available materials have been grouped into chapters which fall naturally into self-contained sections. As the ownership of the manor passes into a new line of descent, so the centre of interest proceeds from one house to another, and in that way the events of the first five chapters form one intertwined story. The second part of the book is devoted to the institutions of the manor, i.e., Medmenham Abbey and Medmenham Church, which were founded and endowed out of the estates of the manor; and Medmenham village, where the tenants of the lordship dwelt. The concluding chapters gather up miscellaneous information

of general interest. Several topics are touched upon in the work about which comparatively little is commonly known, such as the reasons which guided successive invaders in their choice of a permanent habitation, the origin of place-names, child marriage in mediæval England, the sale of heiresses to the highest bidder, the transition from barter into a money currency, and the story of the King's highway.

We believe that readers possessing any interest whatever in local institutions will find in "The Manor of Medmenham" much useful information set out in an attractive narrative. The publication contains thirty-six plans and illustrations, all of them specially produced for this work.

NINETEENTH REPORT OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON HISTORICAL MSS. (His Majesty's Stationery Office).

This report has recently been issued. Amongst the collections of MSS. mentioned in it are two of interest to Berkshire people: the MSS. of the Marquis of Downshire at Easthampstead Park, (the papers of Sir William Trumbull) and the Stuart Papers, Vol. VII. in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle. In the appendix will be found a list of reports already issued and a list of owners of MSS. whose collections have been dealt with by the Commission up to July, 1925. Some of the Commissioners' remarks are rather sorry reading. Alas we all know in these days of high taxation how the contents of the old ancestral mansions of these Isles are being dispersed and many a collection of muniments is no longer to be found in the place it has rested for many a generation. Some collections have crossed the Atlantic to find a home in the United States and sad to relate not in their entirety. The Commissioners in this report make suggestions which are worthy of study: that those who wish to part with their collections should before sending them to the hammer give national or local museums the opportunity of acquiring the collection *en bloc*, or that photographs should be taken of MSS. likely to realise a high figure at the sales. In view of the dispersal of these collections the Commissioners state they are anxious to complete their work as soon as possible. To do this they

ask that funds similar to those in the period before the war may be placed at their disposal and remark that an extra £1,000 per year would be of national benefit.

J.H.C.

THE PROTECTION OF OUR ENGLISH CHURCHES. (Second Report of the Central Committee for the Protection of Churches.) With an account of the Diocesan Advisory Committees and their work for 1924-25. (Press and Publication Board of the Church Assembly, Church House, Westminster. With illustrations, 2/6.)

Throughout the length and breadth of England this report will without doubt receive a welcome from members of Archaeological Societies and from every parishioner of the land, who should lay its contents to heart. Our old parish churches are a mighty heritage from the past and it is pitiable to think of the damage that has been done to them under the name of "restoration." The report tells us there are now only two dioceses which have not advisory committees and nearly every one of these committees report an increase in its work. "It is now possible," says the report, "to say that taking the Church of England as a whole, the majority of her splendid parish churches are enjoying an amount of protection and assistance in archæological and artistic matters such as was unthinkable less than ten years ago." One division of this report has suggestions for the maintenance of the fabric; all ivy and most creepers should everywhere be removed except on certain bare wall surfaces of modern churches. Trees and shrubs should not be allowed to grow too near to a church, on account of the drip from the leaves. Round down pipes should be used in place of the square ones, because the latter cannot be painted behind, in most towers the long spouts that throw the water a distance are both the best and the cheapest. Gutters should be kept clear of leaves, natural drainage should be encouraged by a proper slope to the ground in the church-yard, rubbish heaps should not be placed against the walls, neither should coal or coke dumps, tool-sheds, etc., these are certainly not ornamental. In the eighteenth

century and the last century, galleries were placed in churches, then later in the nineteenth century the re-action came, the galleries were removed, but room had to be found for the displaced seating accommodation. Surpliced choirs were placed in chancels never intended for them, many churches are too full of seats, the passages are too narrow, before and behind the Communion rails there is hardly enough room to move. We are told there are several cases where a return to a west end choir would be beneficial. There are suggestions about the rehangings of bells. The rehangings of bells in ill-designed frames without architectural advice and the addition of bells in towers of weak construction make it very necessary to seek the advice of competent architects. The serious loss of ancient bells by recasting has made it necessary to limit such destruction. There are suggestions for the preservation of wall-paintings, which "are literally our oldest English pictures." There are a great many of these paintings which are not yet uncovered, directions are given for this. The preservation of stained glass is dealt with. We only wish we had room to dwell on the advice given.

Another section deals with the work of the various diocesan committees. Our own Oxford Diocesan Committee held during 1924-25 eleven meetings, when 160 applications for memorial tablets, stained glass windows, reredoses, altars, screens, fonts, lecterns, rearrangements of interiors, rearrangement of bells, external plans and new churches were all considered and dealt with. The Diocesan Church Building Society after conferring with the Diocesan Committee agreed that plans and proposals for grants from the Building Society should be referred to the Diocesan Committee for approval. In many cases the Committee has worked in conjunction with the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings by advising careful repair and conservation; especially is this the case in regard to the chancel arch and east wall of one ancient church in Oxfordshire. In one other case the ruthless interference with the ancient arrangement of screen and return stall was prevented, the scheme was not allowed to go forward. The report of our Diocesan Committee ends with the principles that have governed the Committee in their actions:—

(1) They do not consider it their business to promote any one form of ecclesiastical architecture or to discourage individual thought and work ; (2) In the case of ancient buildings, the Committee think its duties are to preserve ancient buildings from any form of degradation when proposals are made for inserting new furniture, glass, or anything else in the way of alterations or additions. To promote unity by discouraging whatever might cause confusion, such as the introduction by various artists of additions, etc., to the furniture and glass and similar objects without relation to those already in the church ; (3) In modern churches to encourage unity of design and where the advice of the Council is asked, to advise consultation with the original architect ; (4) In both modern and old churches to refuse approval to additions and alterations that are obviously incongruous. A visit is made by one or more members of the Committee to those buildings of which they have not personal knowledge and a report made ; (5) In every case to refuse sanction to what in the Committee's belief is clearly bad and unworthy work.

J.H.C.