

Reviews.

The Victoria County History of the County of Berkshire, Vol. iv. Edited by William Page, F.S.A., and Rev. P. H. Ditchfield, M.A., F.S.A., assisted by J. Hautenville Cope, F.R.Hist.S. London.—*The St. Catherine Press*, 1924.

BY A. L. HUMPHREYS, F.S.A.

WE believe that far too few lovers of local history are aware of the great value of the volumes of the new "*Victoria County History of Berkshire*." It is appropriate, therefore, to call attention to the recent completion of this great work, which has been coming out since 1906, and has just had the coping-stone put upon it in the form of a valuable index. The neighbouring counties of Surrey, of Buckinghamshire, and of Wiltshire, all found able historians many years ago, but nothing was done, except in a superficial way, to cover the history of the whole county of Berkshire, until this great Victoria County History came along.

For twenty-one years this book has been in course of publication, and now that it is complete, its value has increased, for it is no longer a fragmentary work, but a composite whole in which are crystallised all the important facts regarding every parish in the county of Berkshire. The first volume deals with pre-historic man, with Anglo-Saxon remains, with the earliest holders of lands as revealed in Domesday, and much besides relating to early history.

Mr. Ditchfield and Mr. J. Hautenville Cope have contributed much to all the volumes, and Mr. Shrubsole, Canon Fowler and Mr. Harold Peake worked magnificently to make this book a satisfactory county history. But these are not the only workers to whom credit has to be given. First, and above all, Mr. W. Page has stuck to the work throughout, and it is he who has been responsible for the completion of the book. No praise can be too high for Mr. Page's services to the Victoria County History. It is he whom, from his wide knowledge and his skill in managing

his staff, we have to thank and to give credit for some of the best points in the book. Nor should we forget a magnificent worker, the Rev. J. E. Field, Vicar of Benson, the brother of Alderman Field, so well known to us in Reading.

I have referred to the first volume as dealing with the earliest period of Berkshire history. The second volume, which appeared in 1907, had in it a vast amount of valuable matter regarding the many religious houses of Berkshire. Not only are the great Abbeys of Reading and of Abingdon fully dealt with in this volume, but the minor monastic hospitals and priories are fully described, and the whole county is treated in a scholarly and graphic way. The early schools, too, such as those of Reading and Abingdon, are historically dealt with, and the later scholastic establishments of Radley and Bradfield have full space given to them. Sports, both prevailing ones such as hunting, shooting, angling, steeplechasing and rowing, are described, as well as the obsolete sports of bull-baiting, cock-fighting and cudgel-playing.

The publication of the third volume advanced the value of the book greatly, because with this volume there began a parochial survey of the whole county, each parish and village being dealt with individually and completely by trained scholars and those practised in research. Manorial descents, which so greatly add to the value of this book, were done under the supervision of Mr. Page. This third volume deals with ten different hundreds, and all the parishes embraced by them. It includes the most accurate, although perhaps not the most flattering, history of Reading, taken from original documents.

Volume four, which was ready for publication in 1914, but was delayed by the war, completed the parish histories, and now the publication of an admirable index, in separate volume, has made the work complete. Of the high character of the work no praise can be too great. Each manorial history is accompanied by valuable pedigree matter, documented in a way beloved of scholars and trained readers. There are many hundreds of illustrations, including coats of arms, and pictorial representations of choice bits of architecture. The book is a mine of information regarding the county.

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm displayed in the late eighteenth century for the study of local history, no one was then found willing or ready to undertake a history of Berkshire, and although the county presents innumerable points of interest for the historical student, as well as for the lover of the picturesque, Berkshire, as I have said, has remained until now without a satisfactory history. It is the duty of every lover of the past to do what he can to assist the circulation of the book by securing a copy of this great work. There are many leading families in the county who still seem content to be without it, or even without a knowledge of its existence. To these we appeal to support so noble an effort to present the past in a way that ought certainly to stir our imaginations.