

## Review.

THE STORY OF CUMNOR, by M. W. Hughes (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1927).

The name of the author of this little book is not unknown in Berkshire, as Miss Hughes is the daughter of the writer of the voluminous work entitled "Windsor Forest," and who resided at Sunninghill. That book is rather scarce, as a large number of copies were destroyed by fire at the publisher's office. Fortunately they were insured, so that no loss eventuated either to the author or publisher. Some of our readers may be acquainted with the value of the work and recognise the deep research that the late Mr. Hughes must have expended upon its compilation. Miss Hughes seems to have inherited her father's love of literature and pleasant style of writing. She tells us that she assisted her father in the production of his *magnum opus*, and "spent very many hours of work (supposed to be helpful) with him." She has often sojourned at Cumnor during the last thirty years, and has evidently been struck by the romantic story of poor Amy Robsart, which has been the theme of many a scribe from Sir Walter Scott's time to the present day. Her local knowledge is revealed in her book, and she mourns the disfigurement caused by erection of incongruous buildings in recent times which have somewhat marred the beautiful prospects once to be seen from the heights of Cumnor. In other parts of Berkshire and all over the country we have to deplore the same disfigurement.

Before dealing with the mystery of the death of Amy Robsart the authoress devotes some thirty pages to the history of the village. It is difficult to accept some of her conclusions, although they are so charmingly stated that it is hard to criticise. We have a difficulty in connecting Cumnor with St. Columbanus, although it is correct to give the original name of the village Colmonora. It would be hard to prove that St. Birinus, the Apostle of Wessex, was consecrated Bishop of Dorchester before he left Italy and was consecrated at Genoa. Because Oxford was a seat of learning

in 800 A.D., it is a conjecture that its reputation began two centuries before or that St. Cador was one of its teachers. Later on the authoress is on surer ground.

But the main portion of the book is devoted to a reconsideration of the tragedy of Lady Dudley, Amy Robsart, which is very thoroughly discussed. The picture drawn of Robert Dudley is lifelike and just, and the facts of the situation are very clearly told. The letters quoted have all appeared before in Bartlett's "Historical and Descriptive Account of Cumnor Place," published in 1850, which I am glad to possess. The originals are bound up with other MSS. in the second of three folio volumes in the Pepysian Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge, lettered on the back "Papers of State." Miss Hughes is of opinion that Dudley was the instigator of the murder. Everyone knows the story told by Sir Walter Scott in "Kenilworth," which is full of inaccuracies which have been pointed out again and again. They were libels. Anthony Forster has been proved not to have been the wretch Sir Walter painted him. Scott's story was founded on the ballad of "Cumner Hall," a pretty ballad composed by William Julius Mickle, who was born in 1733, a poet and corrector of the Clarendon Press, Oxford. It is very inaccurate. The author of this book deems Dudley guilty. She states that she owes much to Bishop Creighton's history of Elizabeth, although she has arrived at a different conclusion. The Bishop assumes Dudley innocent of his wife's death, but Miss Hughes judges him guilty. At any rate, most readers of the extraordinary story will agree with the description of him by the Spanish Ambassador "as the worst young man I ever encountered. He is heartless, spiritless, treacherous, and false." This interesting book concludes with a short description of the church, which was much damaged by the troopers of Cromwell's army. We commend this charming little book to all Berkshire readers.