

INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF THE RIGHT REV. THE BISHOP  
OF BATH AND WELLS TO THE ANNUAL MEETING  
OF THE INSTITUTE, HELD AT TAUNTON.<sup>1</sup>

In acceding to the invitation so kindly made to me to accept the office of President of the meeting of the Royal Archæological Institute, I was far from supposing that it would be in my power to give any information to the learned body whom I have now the honour of addressing. But as the office which I hold as sixty-ninth bishop of this ancient diocese, and the house in which I live at Wells, are among the most ancient things in the county which the Institute is honouring with its visit, I thought there would be a certain amount of fitness in my presiding, and I felt sure that I should meet with indulgent critics.

My first word, I feel, should be one of welcome from the county of Somerset to our distinguished visitors. We are proud of our county, and therefore are doubly pleased that you should think it worthy of a visit; and we are grateful to you for pitching your tent among us. We, for our parts, shall not omit anything that may conduce to the comfort of our visitors, or to the furtherance of the great purpose which has brought them hither.

That purpose, no doubt, is many sided. Archæological science, in one aspect of it, seeks merely to satisfy a natural curiosity. We come upon an ancient camp. We see the huge earthworks which denote a purpose resolutely and laboriously carried out. It is impossible to see them without wishing to know who raised them, and why they were raised. Somebody thinks that most likely an old windmill stood there. Popular mythology ascribes them to the devil. Archæological science comes to the rescue, and tells us the truth, which lies between these two extremes of prosaic ignorance and mythological imagination. We come upon a building, a church, a castle, a

<sup>1</sup> Delivered August 5th, 1879.

dwelling-house, unlike the other buildings with which we are familiar. One of the first instincts of our nature prompts the enquiry, When was that church, that castle, that quaint-looking house built? And archæology is ready with its answer, usually marvellously precise and accurate. Thus far, then, archæological science merely gratifies a natural curiosity. But it has a far higher and wider range. It marches proudly by the side of the muse of history, and is her fellow-labourer in tracing the progress of man from the infancy to the manhood of his race.

I take it that the three main branches of archæological, as of historical, discovery, are the religious, the political, and the intellectual, condition of man in different parts of the world, and in different ages of his existence. Whatever throws light upon these is of intense interest. To take a glance at them, in the order in which I have named them, as they are illustrated by archæology.

1. What a strong light is thrown upon the religious history of the English people by the cathedrals, the parish churches, and the abbeys, of England. In the grandeur of our religious buildings, in the architectural conception of them, in the enormous outlay of money and labour expended upon them, we see at once the place which the Christian religion and its sublime verities held in the mind of the nation. It was no feeble faith, no uncertain sentiment, no hesitating devotion, which set in motion such a mass of intellect, and such a power of work, as brought those buildings to their glorious completion. Then, again, by their light, aided by those charters and chronicles in which archæology disporteth herself, we can interpret a peculiar phase of the religion of the middle ages, when architecture became a religion: and a kindred phase in which the great builders conceived that they were performing an acceptable personal service to the saint to whom the building was dedicated, and whose private property, so to speak, they conceived it to be. How distinctly engraved, again, are the variations of religious creed in different sections of the Christian community which are seen in the various edifices erected for the worship of God, from the grand simplicity of the Cathedrals of the 12th or 13th century to the gorgeous

Jesuit churches with their developed exaltation of the Blessed Virgin, and their exhibition of fervid, I had almost said ferocious, hatred of heresy; and from these again, with their sumptuous decorations, to the square nudity of an Ebenezer, or Bethlehem Chapel.

The whole history of the struggles between expiring paganism and nascent Christianity, and the force of conflicting passions which blazed in the mind of the Pagan clinging to his errors on the one hand, and of the Christian enraptured at the light of his new creed on the other, was brought before me with singular vividness a fortnight ago when I stood in that most ancient and interesting chapel of the Cathedral Church of St. Vitus at Prague, in which the whole walls inlaid (roughly, but very beautifully) with amethyst, and jasper, and agate, and chrysoprase, testified to the intense love and reverence of Christian Bohemia for their martyred king Wenceslaus I, and recorded how he had fallen by the hand of his own Pagan brother, Boleslaus, zealous for the honour of his heathen gods. A striking lesson of courageous fidelity on one hand, and of the brutality of irresponsible power in an age of tyranny on the other, was impressed on me as I stood upon the bridge from which the saintly John Nepomuk was thrown into the Moldau by the Emperor Wenceslaus because he would not violate the sanctity of confession, and reveal the secrets of the empress, his pious and devoted wife. And, if I may give one more illustration from my recent visit to the ancient capital of Bohemia, a city so wonderfully rich in present beauties and memories of the past, it was no mean lesson in the perverse influence of theological acrimony upon the actions of men, to stand at the spot of the stately palace of the Radschen, from whence, as a means of settling the differences between the Protestants and Roman Catholics of Bohemia, the Protestant champions chucked their adversaries out of the window down some eighty feet to the ground.<sup>1</sup>

These, then, are specimens of the way in which archæology throws light upon the religious history of a people. They would, of course, be easily paralleled by lessons drawn, say, from Stanton Drew, from Ina's Castle

<sup>1</sup> See Schiller's *Geschichte des dreissigjährigen krieges*.

(which has its religious as well as its political aspect) from Glastonbury Abbey in the various stages of its existence, from Old Cleeve, and from the historic site of the peace of Wedmore, where Alfred and Guthrum—Christianity and Heathendom personified—joined hands in a civil and religious peace, and the Church was fertilized by the blood shed on the battle field—one among the many curious developments of our strange human nature!

2. If we turn to the political side of archæological revelations they are as important and as manifold as those just glanced at; and when I say *political*, I mean all that relates to man as a *πολίτης*, a citizen of this nether world, including his social life and his general civilization, as well as what we commonly call political institutions. Take for example the earthworks or camps, for which our county is so remarkable, and which, I think, would well merit an archæological session exclusively devoted to them. As we look at them, perched upon their commanding heights, nearly inaccessible, commanding a view of the whole surrounding country, capable of communicating with each other instantaneously by a system of beacons, and enclosing sufficient space to feed many head of cattle, what a picture is set before us at once of the condition of the people. The idea of constant danger, either from the attacks of neighbouring tribes, expert at cattle lifting, and prompt to revenge real or fancied injuries, or from foreign invaders, rises at once before one's mind. One can see the naked or half-naked savage driving his cattle before him to the place of safety, and, like the Zulu of to-day, having nothing else to lose, and nothing to carry with him. One thinks of a people without houses or towns, without roads, without arts; and yet one catches a glimpse of that love of country, and that unflinching steadiness of purpose to defend and hold one's own, which will eventually develop into freedom at home, and independence of the foreigner abroad. Or look again at Dunster Castle, and the little vassal town which lies tranquilly at its feet. How naturally one constructs a state of society in which a security, which was not given by the law, was grasped by the warrior clad in iron, and intrenched within his castle walls. Or, to take another view, how do the relative positions of

castle and town suggest the idea of an oppressive domination of force, gradually relaxing into a friendly protection of the weak by the strong. And, if you were to go closely into details, you would see every change in the external aspect of the castle, and in the condition of the approaches to it, indicating a corresponding change in the social conditions of English life, and marking the decrease of the power of the individual in exact proportion to the increase of the authority of the law. The same idea suggests itself with some variations when we come across the splendid mansions of the Tudor period, Montacute, or Baympton, or Barrington Court. Here we see a totally different state of society represented to us. We see the home no longer a mere place of refuge, but a place of quiet luxury. Long galleries for recreation, spacious halls for hospitality, pleasure gardens, drawing rooms, libraries even, and the other provisions of an advancing civilization, tell us of the growing wealth, the growing security, and the growing polish of English life. It would be easy to apply the same line of reasoning to our monasteries and abbeys, to our guildhalls, to the ancient town halls of our boroughs, to the ancient symbols of civic power and authority, to the decoration of our churches, to the monuments of the dead, and to read in each of them no mean contribution towards the great end of historical enquiries, that of putting us in possession of the real condition of the people at the different epochs treated by the historian.

3. The light thrown by archæology upon the literary or intellectual condition of the people is no less important. I will not, however, fatigue you by working out this part of the subject. But it is obvious how much the remains of works of art, manuscripts, inscriptions, coins, and so on, must illustrate the mental progress of a nation. It needs not a work like Copernicus' famous astronomical clock at Strasbourg, or the wonderful paintings of the different schools collected in the galleries of Dresden, or Vienna, or Munich, to mark the growth of human intellect and scientific knowledge. If our eyes are open, and we know how to reason from what we see, we shall be able from far meaner materials to form a correct

estimate of the intellectual condition of a people by the various works which they have left behind them.

I ventured to say at the beginning of my address that we who are men of Somerset, either by birth or adoption, are proud of our county; proud of it, of course I meant, specially in an archæological point of view. When I think of the camps, the crosses, the abbeys, the cathedral and other glorious churches, the ancient dwelling houses, the numerous Roman villas and other Roman antiquities at Bath and elsewhere, the Roman roads and Roman mines, the ancient Saxon boroughs of Axbridge and Wedmore, the ancient diocesan and capitular records, and, to cover my own ignorance, let me add *et cætera*, I think I may claim for Somerset that it is not destitute of archæological interest. But it is also the centre of three cycles of poetical or historical drama, which are peculiarly its own and invest it with an especial lustre. I mean the dramas of Arthur, of Alfred, and of Monmouth.

It is no doubt difficult to pin down Arthur and invest him and his companions in the sober vestments of historical reality. But it is pleasant, through the glittering haze and artificial hues of romance and poetry, to catch a glimpse of historic patriotism, and to connect with the hills and combs of our county the image of a real prince, who loved her and fought for her independence against a foreign foe. The Romance writers of the Arthurian cycle no doubt drew all their details and the colouring of their narratives from their own fancy and from the customs and manners of their own times, just as the painters of the *cinque cento* would dress up Abraham and Melchizedek in the armour of the fifteenth century, or assign to King Herod his favourite monkey as he sat at the feast when Herodias begged John Baptist's head.

But, under the mass of legend, I must think there lay a living man of a stout heart and a gentle spirit, who, if he could have spoken Latin, would have said from the bottom of his soul, *Dulce et decorum est pro patriâ mori*. And however the inscription which purported to mark Arthur's grave at Glastonbury may betray its late origin, I think we may connect his death with that great abbey, while we see in the tradition that he never died the fond affection of an unfortunate race who clung to their

independence, and idolized the champion of it. But anyhow, the most sceptical cannot rob us of the glory of the Arthurian literature from the ancient popular Romance down to the idylls of our own Tennyson. I would also add that it does not seem to be a mere accident that the legends of the Christian knighthood of Arthur and his knights draw round Glastonbury, but that we may see in this a consequence of a great historical truth connected with our county, viz. that Somersetshire was (to parody Virgil's words) *Fidei cunabula nostræ*. Here was the cradle of the Christian faith in Britain. The Church traditions of Joseph of Arimathea, the very early existence of a Christian church on the site of St. Joseph's Chapel, as well as the Bardic references of the Welsh Triads to the island of Avalon, all seem to me to fall in with the Arthurian legends, and to indicate that the Gospel which came from the far East found one of its very earliest settlements in these regions of the west. Indeed, if the Gospel came to us *via* Spain (from Gades) on the track of Phenician commerce, as there are grounds to believe that it did,<sup>1</sup> then it is just on these western shores of Britain, and in the tin and lead producing countries, that we should expect to find traces of its most ancient establishment.

If, however, we turn from this somewhat dreamy territory to the second period which I indicated—I mean to the great name of Alfred—then at least we shall be standing on solid and well-defined ground. The man of Somerset, be he warrior, or lawyer, or scholar, or divine, or simple patriot, may well feel his heart tingle within him as he connects the name of Alfred the Great not merely with our English race, but specially with his own county. Aller and Wedmore and Athelney, though they be least among the thousands of England, acquire an importance and an imperishable glory from their connection with the immortal Alfred. And the very marshes and bogs of the Brue and the Parret become objects of reverence and admiration, when we remember that on them the battle of English freedom and of Christianity

<sup>1</sup> So Venantius Fortunatus says of St. Paul.

Transit et Oceanum, vel qua facit insula portum (i.e. the Isla de Leon)  
Quas que Britannus habet terras, quasque ultima Thule.

—*Vita Sti. Martini.*

was fought and won by the great and good King of Wessex.

It is much to be wished that many points connected with the great struggle between Alfred and Guthrum, which are still involved in obscurity, could be cleared up. I need not remind the archæologists here present what important contributions to this end have been made by the learned and able articles of Bishop Clifford in the *Proceedings* of our Society. I think he has nearly succeeded in reclaiming from our rivals in Wiltshire the battle of Edington, and annexing its glories to Somerset soil. But I should like a little stronger light to clear up Egbert's stone, and Eglea and Bratton Castle. Perhaps this meeting may help to give that light.

On another subject, that of Alfred's palace at Wedmore, I will only say that I am looking forward with much interest to the discussion which I hope may follow the Paper which I understand is to be read on the recent excavations there. Whether or no, any part of the foundations which have been laid bare are the foundations of Alfred's *regia villa*, within which Guthrum the Dane feasted with his Saxon godfather, and where the Witenagemot which sanctioned the peace of Wedmore held their sittings is, I confess, to me a matter of very great interest. It is a subject on which I have been converted and perverted, and re-converted and re-perverted, at least half a dozen times, because unfortunately all the eminent archæologists who have viewed them have taken exactly opposite views of what they have examined. The present state of my opinion on the subject is something like that of the balance of a letter-weigher which is vibrating in uncertainty as to the weight of the letter committed to its decision. Will the last oscillation terminate in a satisfactory yes?

The rebellion of Monmouth, the battle of Sedgemoor, and the Bloody Assize, form the third of the dramas to which I alluded, of which this county was the centre. In its way it has an interest of its own of no mean kind. The last of the many civil wars which had desolated our land, the last great battle fought on English soil, the enthusiastic love of liberty and of their national religion shown by the unfortunate people who flocked to the



standard of their weak and incapable leader, the last instance of an English judge degrading his sacred office to that of a tyrant's hangman, and the whole illuminated by the genius of Macaulay, are certainly materials to give a considerable zest to that *admonitus locorum* whose influence we come to seek in the sacred haunts of archæology.

I have left myself no time to touch upon two other heads of archæological science, which I must therefore content myself with barely indicating. The one is the nomenclature of the county, and the other the heraldic history of its families, extant and extinct. Every single name of a place, or river, or hill, has a history to tell us, if we could but rightly interpret it. It would tell us the people who first named it, or the circumstances under which it was given, or some event of national or domestic history connected with it. The *deans* and the *hursts*, the *bys* and the *wicks*, the *hams* and the *tons*, the *burys* and the *worths* have already been compelled to yield their evidence; but how very many names still maintain an obstinate silence. He would do a good service who would give us a really good onomasticon of the names of places in the county, marking their different forms, and the form in which the earliest mention of them is found, and the time of such mention.

Good family history, with pedigrees resting on facts, not on heraldic fiction, is also always valuable. Places and families reflect a mutual interest upon each other, and families which have flourished for centuries on the same land, or have contributed to the public good men eminent in religion, or science, or literature, or arms, or law, or politics, deserve to have a permanent record in the annals of their native county. I would also take advantage of this opportunity to suggest to those who have any collections of family papers the importance of carefully examining them, and giving to the public whatever may be of public interest. It is sad to think how many valuable documents may have perished at the hands of housemaids, and rats, and damp, and fire, during the last four hundred years, which might have been rescued by being printed. Nobody knows what may be in old chests and cupboards and strong rooms, till they have had their papers examined. The very interesting work

lately published by the Duc de Broglie, entitled "Le Secret du Roi," a considerable portion of which is derived from unpublished family archives, is a striking example of how much valuable historical information is sometimes to be found among neglected family papers. Parts of the memoirs of George II, written by my great grandfather Lord Hervey, and in his own handwriting, were almost obliterated by damp at the time of their publication, some thirty years ago, and would have been irrecoverably lost ten or twenty years later. I would therefore urge upon individuals and upon bodies corporate the duty (if the term is not too strong) of having their papers carefully examined and indexed, and of giving to the public whatever may be found in them of public interest or importance. Would it be possible by the formation of guilds, or by annual prizes, or in any other way to stimulate familiarity with those difficult handwritings which people find such a barrier to the study of registers and deeds, and other ancient documents?

With this question I close my address, only adding the hope that by this "meeting of the wise" fresh light may be thrown upon things and men and places, which are of chief interest to those whose home is in the County of Somerset.