

INAUGURAL ADDRESS TO THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE INSTITUTE HELD AT BEDFORD.¹

By C. MAGNIAC, M.P.

On this occasion it is not a lecture that I should like to give, or you would wish, to hear from me, but I am entitled almost to claim to be a fellow worker in the field in which you are engaged. For many years I have been an ardent lover of objects of art, illustrating, different times and the progress which the world and man have made, and it gives us, I am sure, great satisfaction that your visit should be paid to this county, because we want you to dig up the dry bones and clothe them with flesh, so that we may know what we have beneath our soil.

We have a great deal to learn in this county. It has been said with truth that we have no county history. There are some scattered essays about different edifices and different parts of this county, but undoubtedly they require to be worked up into one whole, so that the student of Midland county life may have laid before him a book to which he can refer as illustrating the progress which we have made from the times of those who went before us. Now in saying that I am, perhaps, rather begging the question. We are very apt in these days to talk of progress, and I think we do not sufficiently acknowledge and remember—it is because we are not sufficiently aware of—the position and condition of those who inhabited these islands before we came here. I think it is probable, I may say certain with respect to every other county that has been thoroughly and carefully examined, that you will find a high state of civilization in places, and under conditions where it would have been thought impossible that it should have ever existed.

Now of our county, in the time of the British owners of it, absolutely nothing is specifically known; all I believe we do know of solid and substantial fact is this—there are two great roads in this country, Watling-street, and Icknield-way, which have been and are popularly claimed, or rather assumed to be, Roman, but which I believe from evidence I have seen, are no doubt British. Now it is not reasonable to suppose that two great roads of that kind can have been isolated instances of the condition of the people, without the accompanying civilising results from such means of communication. These roads lead directly through this county—I won't go into their history now because there are gentlemen here who are more competent to enter into the subject than I am—they lead right through the county, and indicate, as I have said,

¹ Delivered July 26th, 1881.

traffic and inter communication, the result of which would be certainly civilisation, and which could only result from civilisation.

As regards Roman times we know very little. In the county there are some Roman remains, but I fancy they have been very imperfectly examined, but they must be of considerable importance, because certainly the Romans inhabited no country in the world for two or three hundred years without leaving behind them striking marks of their knowledge of art, of their knowledge of science, and of all that renders life agreeable, not to say useful.

Then again, following this we had the Saxons, we had the Danes, we had the old British nation, living side by side with each other, not always the best of friends, as this town itself is a striking proof, because one of the greatest battles of those times which gave the whole country to the victor, was fought in the town of Bedford. We have a record in Luton itself of the man whose name is attached to Luton, Robert Hoo. He was a great man, and a well-considered man, in the time of King Canute. These seem to us to be very old and very remote times, and there are many of us who know very little about them. It would be of passing and of striking interest that we should have fuller information. I think, as I said at the outset, if these things were unveiled, they would point out to us a condition of things under our feet and before our eyes of which we have very little knowledge, very little perception, and perhaps very little idea.

From these British, Danes, and Saxons, we come down to the times of the Normans who left us visible proof of their existence and of their knowledge of the arts, in the magnificent churches, and chapels, and abbeys, with which this county is endowed. We have them before us, but I venture to say that we know very little about them. It is exceedingly doubtful, I believe, who was really the architect of the noble parish churches which exist in my own neighbourhood. I have been told this and I have been told the other, but I have never seen the statements corroborated by any reasonable and fair amount of proof, and yet that these proofs exist I have not the slightest doubt whatever, in some unlooked-for records which might be found. In illustration of that I will beg leave to mention a case which has occurred to me within the last few days.

I happened to be in Spain last Easter, when I found accidentally in an old house a picture which appeared to me to be of surprising interest, and I managed to acquire it and brought it over to London. I have shown it to some ten or twelve gentlemen well acquainted with the works of painters, with the manner of painting, with all that appertains to the knowledge of who a picture is painted by, and not three of those authorities agree as to the painter of my picture. They all assume it to be the work of a great painter, but they most of them differ, by two's or by three's. I happened in the course of my enquiry and search for a competent person to assist me, to find an art student who has made it the object of his life to study the pictures of that time, that is to say from about 1450 to 1550. This gentleman unfolded to my astonished eyes records of painters of whom, in this country, and even in Germany, where they painted, absolutely no public knowledge exists. He ascertained the names of works, he ascertained the prices which were paid, he ascertained the names of the wives and the families of these painters, solely from the records of a town in Germany like this

town of Bedford. The records of these paintings appear to have been kept as a matter of course in the archives of the different town councils. This knowledge will appear interesting mainly to those who have studied that particular subject, but I mention it as an indication of what has been existing for three or four hundred years without the persons in whose care and custody it was being aware of its existence. The painters of the pictures of that time have been described as Holbein, and if not Holbein, Van Eyk, and if not these then some unknown master of the school of Van Eyk, and all the time the knowledge of the men who painted these pictures, and descriptions of them, existed in those records.

I have no manner of doubt whatever that if the records of this county and other counties were searched we should find most interesting information with regard to the works of those great Normans who beautified our land. I won't allude to the details connected with the churches which you are about to visit. There is Dunstable Church, of which I find a description in the paper of proceedings; Felmersham Church, Elstow, and other places where you will be taken, and we hope you will give us information in regard to them.

I would like to say a word on the general principals of these meetings. What I particularly hate is that Archæology should be looked upon as a sport and not as a serious subject, in fact a subject of science. We do not want to make these meetings a gigantic picnic; that is not the object with which we have met together, and I beg leave to say that it would be very ill-requiting the labours of the secretaries and other gentlemen who have taken the trouble to organise these expeditions, who have taken the trouble to procure information and to have it ready for those who choose to profit by it, if it is merely to be a summer outing of three or four days, to enjoy the fresh air and the singing of the birds, and make believe that Archæology was being talked about—that is not what these meetings are for. The days of ridicule of Archæologists are long gone by. I suppose everybody here has read of the sort of Archæological meeting described in Dickens' first work; it was undoubtedly, and unfortunately, a very true picture of what went on in many of the so-called Archæological meetings in those days. I am happy to say that we have recovered from that malady, we are ready to take Archæology as it ought to be taken, in a serious way, and, what is more, Archæologists are entitled to claim that the deeds they have done justify the claims they set up to be looked upon as serious people doing a great work for their country.

Is it possible—I believe it is impossible—for any age to have shown in this particular class of work such results as have been produced in the last 50 years? All London went to stare at Cleopatra's Needle. It does not seem to be known that it is not fifty years ago that the writing on Cleopatra's Needle was a sealed book. Champollion, a Frenchman, and Young, our own countryman, within the last fifty years succeeded in deciphering the key to that language, and what is the result of it? It unfolded the history of six thousand years. I am quite aware that it is rather dangerous for Archæologists to talk of time. There was a time when certain people attempted to fix even to a day or an hour, from Bible history, the day when the world was made, and out of their own consciousness the hour at which it would terminate, but I think what has been discovered has shown the futility and foolishness, resulting from absolute ignorance, of such surmises, for if one thing more than another has resulted from

archæological efforts—if one thing more than another has justified the attempts that have been made to fix with precision the great events of the world—it has been the absolute confirmation of the Bible, not only in what was clear but in illustrating points which were abstruse. When we are told to an hour when an event happened something has been shown to exist which shows it was merely our foolishness and ignorance which prevented us from understanding what we were told. I say that those six thousand years of the world's history which the knowledge of the deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphics has enabled us to read, has strengthened the position of all those who love the Bible. Instead of, as was supposed, making it dangerous and shaking our faith it does more to confirm it and strengthen it than anything else.

I do not wish to go further with this line of argument. I wish to confine myself to the scientific and practical part of the subject ; I do not want to infringe upon faith. What I want to insist upon is this, that as far as the knowledge of the facts of history go, everything that we have found or discovered absolutely confirms the Bible narration, and therefore it is surely to our advantage to continue to open the uncut leaves of the Book of History. It is very true that sometimes people say, in Egypt you have got the whole thing before you. You see inscriptions on the monuments, pyramids and pillars over the whole country. What so natural that people should have tried to decipher them. But certainly that was not the case of Babylon and Nineveh. The great plains on which they are situated were sometimes inundated with floods for months in the year, and sometimes they were so dry that everything green perished and nothing was left but a dead uniformity of brown earth. The river wandered from place to place, making a marsh here and a dry place there ; a few mounds almost insignificant were left by the side of that river, and that was the field Layard began to work upon when he took up the idea of discovering the site of ancient Nineveh. I need not say what extraordinary results have followed these discoveries. It is almost impossible to fathom the amount of information which has been found buried beneath that place. The efforts of Sir Henry Rawlinson in deciphering that extraordinary language have been most successful. It should be remembered that the records were found in buildings, the roofs of which had fallen in, and can only be likened to petrified books in a library. These records were written in an alphabet and language which were unknown, and it has been worked out by comparison with those things that were known, by the patient working of such men as Layard, Rawlinson, and other workers in the same field, until at the present moment many of the most minute facts connected with the history of the inhabitants of Babylon and Nineveh are as plain before us as an open book. Even lately I was shown a most curious cylinder of that kind which related to a very simple matter in private life, and it showed how very much in advance of us those Babylonians and Ninevites were in practical matters, upon which we pride ourselves so much. This was a conveyance of a field by one man to another. The record was written, I presume, not at the rate of 3s. 4d. a line, it was written in the briefest possible terms consistent with clearness, and at the foot was a small plan beautifully incised, so clear and so simple as to boundaries that the man who had it could carry the title deed in his hand and there could be no mistake about it. I admit that such a system would be attended by in-

conveniences; there would be no room for chancery suits, for Sir Roger Tichborne's, and for questions of that kind which may last out of a lifetime, and wear out the hearts and minds of the unfortunate people who have to suffer from them. But it certainly has its advantages, and I am inclined to think the advantages on their side will rather outweigh those on ours. So in these things we have certainly something to learn from those who went before us.

Everyone has read of those wonderful discoveries of Dr. Schliemann on the site of Troy. I think the most extraordinary point connected with his discovery is this: he found at that particular place no less than four cities, one superimposed upon the other, the builders of which were evidently absolutely ignorant that they were building upon other towns the knowledge of which was entirely lost. We may congratulate ourselves that we live in times when we can profit by the labours of such workers as these.

Then, Palestine, what has been done there? Only during the last fortnight, in the famous pool at Siloam, an inscription has been discovered of the time of Solomon: I have no doubt whatever it is the oldest authentic inscription of that kind in the world. That has been lying under the feet and before the eyes of thousands of wayfarers, and it was not until an accidental explorer went into the conduit a little further than usual that he came across this living evidence of the times of which we read in the Bible.

We have a great deal still to do. There is Mexico, Peru, and the Etruscans, the most wonderful nation, looked at from an artistic point of view, that ever inhabited the earth. I believe all the principles of fine art were derived from the Etruscans. I believe that from them the Greeks, and Romans, and certainly the Italians of more modern times, found instruction in science and in art, and that we might also do so if we chose to follow their example. If you examine those recovered pictures from the times of the Etruscans, you will find face after face which might have been taken for a picture by Raphael. I believe that Raphael must have studied from them. Finer models, more useful, more pure, more simple, it is utterly impossible to conceive. They are evidently the work of a nation in the highest condition of civilization. About that nation, of their language, their history, their origin we know not a single word.

Then among ourselves we have got in this country a number of those most remarkable constructions which go by the name of Stone Monuments. I hardly like to touch upon this matter here, because I believe there is no subject which has been the cause of so much difference of opinion as that has been. The explanation simply lies in our own ignorance. We are obliged to evolve out of our own consciousness some theory that fits in with a particular fact that we happen to be aware of. I believe that that book will not always be a sealed one. It is not many years ago when a King of England, happening to see one of the most remarkable of these monuments we possess, sent an architect down specially to enquire, examine, and let him know who built it. He went down and remained there a week or ten days, and returned with the extraordinary intelligence that this was a Roman temple of the Tuscan order, built by some one to whom he gave a Roman name which he had evidently discovered in the first Latin Grammar he came across. That was the report he

gave of Stonehenge. I do hope and trust and believe that we shall not always remain in a state of ignorance with reference to these monuments. They must have been built by a nation well skilled in the mechanical arts, who never could have had the intention of erecting extraordinary monuments of that kind without having in their mind some idea of which they were the embodiment and which we at any rate should be no worse to be made acquainted with. Undoubtedly there was an idea underlying these different monuments, and I hope and trust that the reproach of ignorance on those points will be removed before long from Archæologists.

As to our own county there are plenty of facts we should like to know; plenty of things for observation and investigation. Sometimes people say, what is the use of all this? We think there is a very present and great use. There is no use in admiring a thing because it is old. That hateful word "curiosity," I am glad to say, is being eliminated from Archæological language. Nothing makes me so ill and sick when receiving people at my house, as I sometimes do, for them to tell me in a rapid way, that they have come to see my curiosities. I tell them I have no curiosities. I have nothing in my house but that which the mind of man evolved, having been educated up to the point which enabled him to do so. I believe to-day, with ourselves, that is the *cui bono* of our purpose. We want to cultivate our knowledge and bring it to such a point that we may use it as Owen did, when he saw the fragment of a bone, and read off, like as from a book, that the animal to whom it had once belonged was an amphibious animal, with a long tail, a large mouth, and a certain number of teeth; that it ate certain things, and had lived a certain number of years. From that he was able to deduce the kind of country it lived in, the kind of climate it lived in; he was also able to deduce that the position in which it was found in all respects differed essentially and materially from the necessary conditions which were required to enable it to live. He was consequently able to deduce that an enormous and great change had come over the country in which the animal was found; and he was able to come to some conclusion as to whence and what was the cause of those changes. From these and other reasons he was able to infer the period when those changes took place, and the result was that he was able to form within reasonable limits a fair opinion as to the time when such animals existed. And all that was derived from the splinter of a broken bone. That is the way in which we want to apply our archæological knowledge. We want to make use of it in order that when we find the fragment of a pinnacle of a church, or the fragment of a stone, or the fragment of a brick, we may be able to say—as many gentlemen here can say—that brick was of the time of Cæsar, that stone was quarried in the time of Titus, or that carving may have been designed by the architect of one of our own churches.

These are the principles upon which we desire to study Archæology, and that is one of the reasons why we recommend it to your notice. It unfolds to us the history of the world; it unfolds to us the greatest of all histories, the history of man, with which animals are woven so inextricably up to a certain point, and we hope to go beyond that point. The hope, expectation, and belief that traces of man will still be found beyond and above a certain time is always, I believe, in the minds of every Archæologist. It is something like the blue rose of the gardener, or

the valuable and beautiful picture which some lover of pictures expects to find for 5s. in a broker's shop, and lives to the end of his life without finding it. The life of one Archæologist may be short, but the life of all Archæologists is long. Societies live, and I hope will live for many many years—at any rate long enough to elucidate some of these problems.

There is one argument in favour of our aspirations upon which I should like to say a word or two.

We hear very often of the Augustan age, the Elizabethan age, and the Cinque Cento period. Does it always occur to us that these ages did not spring full-armed from the particular period in which they flourished? They must have had a commencement. The foundation and the cause of the superiority of those ages must have been laid in preceding years from preceding causes. I venture to hope and believe that what we are doing now is laying the foundation of an age which will have its name. I say the history of those great ages has never been properly written. There must have been causes at work which cohered to bring those great men of culture into the world almost, one may say, simultaneously. Take for instance that Cinque Cento period—1450 to 1550—when you can name almost all the great painters of the world. It is not merely copying that makes a painter; it is the knowledge of history, the knowledge of ideas, the knowledge of learning, single-mindedness of purpose, extraordinary catholicity of mind, and above all, what we find in all great painters, the extraordinary religious tone of their minds, which enabled them to press their whole convictions, the whole of their capacities upon the objects they had before them. There must have been something preceding that time to have caused that galaxy of talent. I hope we may lay the foundation of a revival. I hardly like to say "revival;" I would prefer to say "a new birth," because I have no faith in revivals. I have very little faith in copies, which may serve their object for a moment. I have no faith in imitations whatever. I believe the great secret of art to be originality, and unless it is original it is nothing. If you cannot apply the principles of Archæology as you would the principles of Euclid to the science of art, I believe we shall come to nothing. I believe copying for a student, up to a certain point, may be good, but beyond that imitation is worse than useless. I would, therefore, express an earnest hope that we are laying the foundations, not of a revival, but of a new birth in art and architecture.

I should like to enlist your sympathies for a cause I have very much at heart. We have in this country three of the grandest museums of the world—the British Museum, the National Gallery, and the museum at South Kensington, and half-a-dozen or a dozen others scattered about London. Everyone of those different museums is under a governing body, and I do not hesitate to say that not one of those museums is under the proper governing body. For the British Museum we have fifty trustees, representatives of families that have contributed liberally to its formation, and great men of the day. The Archbishop of Canterbury is, by right of being Archbishop of Canterbury, the leading spirit of that body, and he happens to be a very capable and very competent man. But I hardly need say that a body chosen, not elected, under such conditions, is likely to be rather Conservative than otherwise. I do not think there is any particular division of art which has been furthered by the British Museum, without their own walls, they having been content and anxious

to keep the whole thing to themselves. The National Gallery is in much the same condition. The South Kensington is a much younger museum, having only been established since 1851, and is willing to do all it can, but what we want is all these great museums joined together under one competent and authoritative head, and to be applied, not to the conservation in locked cases in dusty rooms of objects of invaluable art, but to be made subservient to art and Archæology all over the country. Every Archæologist should endeavour to help forward this movement. We want to see these art treasures and these Archæological treasures, now within these walls and distributed in these cases, so situated as to be available to places like Bedford which are willing from time to time to receive them and get instruction from them.

I must apologize for having detained you so long. I am certain I may confidently say that the county of Bedford will give a hearty welcome to this Archæological Institute. We all feel our deficiencies in our knowledge of art: we all have something to learn, even the gentlemen who have come to teach us may possibly learn something from us. I feel sure the examination of the objects in the county, whether of art or nature, or of something between the two, will be of great interest, and that our knowledge of them will receive an extraordinary accretion from the visit which is being paid to us this year. I am sure everyone in the county will be ready to place at the disposal of the visitors everything in his power. I for one, in my humble way, shall be only too glad to do so, and I am confident I may say the same for everybody else.

What we have to show, I think, of the greatest interest in the county is the extraordinary church architecture. I think it would be difficult to over-estimate, and it is difficult sometimes to appreciate, the value of these edifices, and the best way to appreciate them is to bear one of them in one's mind and to compare it with something new—something that is being built at the present time. Without any disparagement to architects, I think they have still got to have "a new birth." We want to have a national architecture for this country; we want such an architecture as shall have the stamp of individuality and originality upon it. We do not want to have bad imitations of beautiful buildings; we do not want servile copies of those buildings; what we want is a national architecture which shall be a glory and pride to the country; and if the edifices of our county contribute in, however small a degree, to that end, we shall feel with pride that our labours on this occasion will have been well repaid.