

OPENING ADDRESS OF THE HISTORICAL SECTION.¹

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It is almost exactly forty-two years since the Royal Archæological Institute paid its first visit to the city of Norwich. It was on the 29th July, 1847, that Bishop Stanley presided in St. Andrew's-hall at the inaugural meeting, which was held to welcome the coming of this society, and to initiate its proceedings. Charles, third Marquis of Northampton, was President of the Anti-quarian Section, Dr. Peacock, Dean of Ely, was President of the Architectural Section, and in the Historical Section the chair was taken by one of the most profound and philosophic historians whom England has ever produced—Henry Hallam.

There were giants in the earth in those days. Dr. Whewell, the Master of Trinity, was amongst them, and so were John Mitchell Kemble and Professor Sedgwick, whom some of us remember, and Professor Willis, whose nephew, J. W. Clark, represents him among us to-day, men who were born to be leaders, and will not cease to be remembered as the founders of scientific archæology in England. We are but followers of them. What they began others have carried on, and the work that they set on foot two generations ago has never stopt, and shows no sign of ceasing and no lack of labourers—intelligent labourers unsparing of themselves, labourers animated by the same thirst for knowledge, the same enthusiasm, and the same earnest desire to buy the truth and sell it not, of which our founders presented in their lives such a noble example.

For myself, standing here to-day in the place which so

¹ Read at the Annual Meeting of the Institute, at Norwich, August 8th, 1889.

great a man as Hallam occupied when the Institute last assembled in this city, I am far less inclined to be lifted up with pride than humbled by the depressing sense of inferiority which comes upon me as I begin to address you. One of the gods of Olympus was your president here in 1847. Well might it be asked, with some wonder, "Who is he—the man of common clay—who dares to sit in the same seat of honour in 1889?"

In 1847 archæology was quite a new study in East Anglia—the Norfolk and Norwich Archæological Society had only been started two years—and the new subject was by no means the fashion. There was a general impression that an antiquarian must needs be an old man—a musty, fusty old man. Dominie Sampson was accepted as the type of a class, and there was a wide-spread belief that old men, as a rule, had two absurd vices, one was saving money with none to gather it, and the other was grubbing into the secrets of the past with nobody to interpret them! It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if of all those forty-three gentlemen who at its first starting constituted the governing body of our society, only a single one survives, the veteran Mr. John Gunn, whose name appears still on the list of our vice-presidents to day.

Of the rest, some have not left themselves without witness. Among them Sir John Boileau, F.R.S., bearer of an illustrious name—who for more than twenty years presided over our society, and on whose son, Sir Francis Boileau, his father's mantle has fallen. While deploring Sir Francis' absence from among us to-day, and regretting the cause, we may hope that the illness which keeps him from being with us may leave no serious effects behind it, and we look forward with confidence to some years of research and vigorous work for our society under the presidency of the son—such work as shall not be unworthy of what was achieved under the presidency of his father.

I will venture this morning to put your patience to the test by endeavouring briefly to remind you how very different is the standing-point which archæologists in England take up to-day from that which they occupied when the Institute first came among us in 1847. But I must needs confine myself to our own limited field of

research, for to travel beyond it would carry me a great deal too far.

In the first place, it must be remembered that forty years ago the momentous question of the Antiquity of Man, as it is called, had hardly been thought of. I have a perfect recollection of reading a long letter in *The Times* newspaper during the summer of 1846, in which the writer, adopting a timidly apologetic tone, pleaded for toleration of his errors—if they were errors—and piteously argued that it really was possible, or, at any rate, it was conceivable, that a man might remain a Christian and yet believe that the world was more than 6,000 years old. In those days it was held to be an article of faith—a sort of 40th article, to be tacked on to the other 39—that the period anterior to the coming of our Lord had been accurately measured by a kind of chronological two-foot rule, and had been found to carry us back exactly 4004 years—so many and no more. In those days the geologists were a mere handful, and many of them seemed afraid of their own discoveries, at any rate were afraid of proclaiming them too loudly. That 4004 years superstition hung like an albatross round the neck of the man of science; he trembled to throw it off, and yet as long as it hung there he was hopelessly hampered in all his movements. He could not look behind him, it was impious to imagine an immemorial past, a too audacious peering into which might dash all hopes of a celestial future. Historians took their stand upon what was admitted by all to be a basis of absolute certainty. Into the region of cloudland, as it was assumed to be, only dreamers would think it worth their while to wander. The muse of history, it was said, was a stern and severe goddess, who set her face against speculation and inference—which were only other names for idle guesswork. What was found written in a *book* was evidence; everything else must be distrusted, and at the best must be received with the utmost caution, not to say suspicion. Accordingly, English history, it was insisted on, began in the year 55 B.C., when Julius Cæsar landed on our island. There was the *terminus a quo* which, by common consent, historians and archæologists adopted forty years ago, and which at that time hardly anyone ever thought of getting to the back of.

And yet there was no disputing the fact that the Greeks and Romans had heard of this Britain of ours, and knew something about it, too, centuries before the Christian era. As early as the time of Alexander the Great, Pytheas of Massilia wrote an account of his journey to Britain, and professed to have travelled through the island. It is true that Polybius, about 100 years after, assures us that he could have done nothing of the sort, for he was too poor a man to have made such a costly voyage. It is true also that Strabo, 150 years or so after Polybius, though quoting Pytheas and making use of his works, pronounces him to have been a great liar. But again, that has been found to be a very cheap accusation, often thrown at travellers in ancient and modern times, and yet proved in the long run to have been undeserved. Against Polybius and Strabo we may set the authority of Eratosthenes of Cyrene, in the third century B.C., and of Hipparchus of Bithynia, who lived about 100 years later. Each of these men was the most eminent mathematician and astronomer of his time. Neither of them was a man likely to be led astray by fictitious narratives. Both believed in Pytheas, and both appear to have made use of his travels. Travellers, we are assured, tell strange tales, but a man may be a liar and yet be a traveller. Be it as it may, even at the worst here is a traveller, who asserted that he had visited an island, knowing it to have been an island, 300 years or so B.C., and who got credit for information which he published, information which a generation or two after his death the great teachers of the world were reading, discussing, criticising, and using. As time went on, Strabo, who hardly deserves to be called a great man in any sense, viciously protests that this traveller told lies. Might not the same be said of our old friend, Sir John Mandeville? Yet who doubts that he went where he said he went, even though he tells us some things which he could hardly have seen with his own eyes?

But fifty years ago hardly anyone among us thought it worth while to bestow criticism upon Pytheas, or Poseidonius, or even Strabo. To archæologists the old geographers were almost quite unknown. Not that

those archæologists were idle, or wanting in sagacity, Very far from this; they gave themselves no rest, and their labours were not fruitless. A school of enquirers (who I will venture to call the Romanist school) rose up about this time, and their enthusiasm and success gave, as it could not but give, a great impetus to research. Roman Britain became the fashion, and well that it did so. Year by year and month by month we were startled by some brilliant discovery of "Roman remains," and surprise succeeding surprise compelled us to draw inferences, while they let in fresh light upon us all. But they were always *Roman* remains. The villas, the theatres, the baths, the luxury, the splendour, were all Roman. Nobody seems to have remembered that sneer of Tacitus (Tac. Agricola, c. 21), in which he superciliously mocks at the airs the Britons gave themselves in adopting the customs of their conquerors; much in the same tone that a London tailor might sneer at a country-made dress-coat, or a pert journalist might point his ridicule at a farmer's daughter presuming to play the paino. In fact, no one seems to have seen clearly what the real question was which archæologists should set before themselves—archæologists who hoped to get *behind* the line of certainty which historians had somewhat arbitrarily laid down. The main question really was *not* what did the Romans *do* in Britain, but what did they *find*? Or, perhaps, the question which pressed for answer, and which still pressed, might be stated thus—

"What was there in this Britain of ours which made it worth while for the Romans to invade it in the century before Christ—which compelled them to leave it un-attacked for another 100 years (though again and again during that century they bragged of what they were going to do in the way of subduing it), which forced them at last to carry out their threats in 44 A.D., and which induced them, after that to keep their hold of the island for 400 years, repaying them in some shape or other for an expenditure which fairly bewilders us when we try to estimate its magnitude?" I do not think that archæologists have ever set that problem before themselves with a clear conception of the issues involved in its solution,

or with an intelligent determination *to grapple with it*. It is not difficult to account for this. The truth is that the wonderful discoveries announced simultaneously by archæologists from all parts of the world, about 25 years ago, and which in their cumulative force constituted a body of evidence absolutely overwhelming; discoveries which allowed us no longer to hesitate in our conviction that man had been living and toiling, fighting and slaying, making his tools and advancing in the arts of civilised life, far, far back, even into the glacial period (and how much earlier none dared to guess), these discoveries dazzled us all. Everybody went groping about for flint implements, and everybody who groped long enough found them. Archæology in England for a while went half mad upon the antiquity of man. The Romanists found themselves at a discount. The palæolithic and neolithic periods, the intense eagerness to add something to what had been established by Mr. Prestwich, Mr. Evans, Sir J. Lubbock, or Mr. Pengelly among ourselves; or the desire to illustrate the splendid discoveries of Boucher de Perthes, Lartet, Nilson, and others abroad, called away the field—if I may so express it—from hunting the Roman fox. An archæological red herring was drawn across the scent, and the hounds started off in full cry and took another line. These things will happen often enough in a long run—at any rate it used to be so when I was young; we came to a check, but we made a fresh start, and the chase began again as hotly as ever. Unluckily, however, in this instance the thing did not end there. By one of those curious and not uncommon popular delusions which grow up, one knows not how, in times of excitement—religious, political, or intellectual—it came to pass that a persuasion amounting to a conviction took possession of a very large section even of the more intelligent portion of the community—who might have been supposed to know better—that the prehistoric discoverers who had found out so much about the men of the age of the mammoth and the cave bear had somehow been dealing with the same ancient Britons whom Cæsar fought with and failed to subdue. Was not he, this ancient Briton, a prehistoric man? For had not history begun in B.C. 55, and did not the Briton exist before this grand *terminus a*

quo? If it were so the Roman occupation could only have been a military occupation, and it was idle to suppose that anything could be discovered about the half-savage subject people that was worth knowing.

In addressing an assembly like this, I am anxious to avoid truisms, and yet it is necessary to remind you that there are still too many in the outer world who require to be told that the period of time which separates *us* from the men who fought with Cæsar, and beat him back, is but as a span long compared with that immeasurably vaster period which separates those ancient Britons from the men of the caves and the elevated river gravels, who hunted the mammoth and the woolly rhinoceros with bone harpoons and flint spears and arrows. Between those earlier inhabitants of Albion and the Britons who faced the Roman legions, so enormous a lapse of ages intervened that in the interval not only had the whole animal life of Britain changed, not only had the old fauna disappeared from our island, but from every part of the habitable globe.

And yet it is hardly too much to say that, thanks to the wonderful sagacity and the untiring and the triumphant researches of the prehistoric archæologists, we know almost as much about the life and the habits of the men of that vastly remote past as we do about the civilisation of those later inhabitants of this island who, in comparison with the others, are but the men of yesterday. Surely we ought to have got to know more about those men of yesterday by this time. Some things regarding those British progenitors of ours are well enough established. They had been trading in copper and tin for centuries; they worked the lead mines of the Mendips and the ironstone of Sussex; the first ground of quarrel with them which the Romans had, was because they had allied themselves with the Veneti, who fought that famous sea-fight with Cæsar the year before he invaded us, and the Veneti, we are told, astonished Cæsar by letting down their anchors with chain cables. Clearly, too, those Britons had a formidable mercantile marine; twenty years after Cæsar's coming they monopolised the carrying trade of the Channel, and the export and import duties which they paid constituted an appreciable item in the

Roman revenue (Strabo IV., c. v.) The southern part of our island, too, we hear was thickly studded with buildings (*creberrima ædificia* Cæsar B.G. iv., 13.) Agriculture was carried on on a large scale, especially to the north of the Thames; they had a currency, even a coinage; they had an extensive network of roads; before long Britain became a corn growing country, and the epicures of Rome appreciated very highly the oysters of Richborough. I suspect that the Roman coachbuilders introduced improvements in their fashionable carriages from our side of the Channel. The sentiment of nationality was strong among them; Cassivelaunus ruled over a kingdom that was firmly consolidated, with a splendidly organized army, and such a mighty cavalry force as Rome had never encountered since the days when Hannibal's Numidian horsemen swept over the plains of Italy. When at last Cassivelaunus came to terms, he still had 4,000 chariots that he could bring into the field. Of the Druid hierarchy we unhappily know but little, but this we do know, that they were a highly educated class and the educators of the people, that they had some knowledge of geography and astronomy, and clearly a very elaborate ritual. As to the nonsense which Cæsar talks about their filling colossal clothes-baskets with human victims and making bonfires of them, we must take such stories for what they are worth. But reflect upon all the evidence that has come down to us, and give it only the weight it deserves, and remember that London was confessedly a great emporium long before Cæsar's landing, and continued to be so without a break in its prosperity down to the outburst of that dreadful rebellion of the subject people who had been driven to madness by Roman tax gatherers, Roman *money lenders*, and Roman ruffianism of all sorts; and then consider whether it can be quite so absolutely certain as has been assumed that all those villas and pavements, those roads and baths, those vestiges of a vanished art and a vanished culture, are strictly what we understand by Roman remains, that is, the work of foreign hands, designed by foreign ingenuity, constructed exclusively for Roman officials, who lived outside of the life of a race held in subjection for all those four centuries. Can this people have been

so barbarous at starting, and so incapable of assimilating the new ideas, the new civilisation, of their conquerors, that, when the aliens left them to defend themselves, they (the Britons) became the prey of the new invaders, *not* because they were mastered by overwhelming multitudes from outside, but because they were incapable of doing anything in their own defence as soon as they were deprived of the guidance and command of those very Roman leaders who had themselves run away from any further contest with the hordes of irresistible marauders? Is all this so certain as the majority among us has quietly assumed it to be? I ask as a mere enquirer. I throw out a suggestion. I presume to do no more.

Be it as it may, this *is* quite certain, that we have not yet collected all the evidence that can be gathered, and that our only hope of arriving at clear views on the condition of this island and its inhabitants, say during the four centuries before Cæsar's coming and during the four centuries after his landing, lies in carefully and exhaustively mapping out the discoveries that have been and that remain to be made. The suggestion of the congress that assembled at Burlington-house last year must be carried out systematically, scientifically, and every local archæological society must set itself to construct an archæological map of its own county or district, in which the site of every "find" may be accurately set down, and the significance of every vestige of the handiwork of our progenitors be estimated by correlating it with others that may have been tabulated.

It may be almost said to be a reproach upon our Norfolk archæologists that no one among us has as yet attempted examination of the Pedders' Way, the Devil's Dyke, or of the old trackways which certainly did serve their purpose as lines of communication between distant points in bygone ages. Mr. Warne, in his magnificent work on Ancient Dorset, gave us the results of his researches in this line of enquiry nearly twenty years ago; but no Norfolk archæologist up to this moment has taken the hint or followed Mr. Warne's lead, though it is obvious that only a local antiquary can carry on research of this kind with much hope of arriving at satisfactory

results. A man *must* start on such research furnished with the necessary requisite of local knowledge. He must be in touch not only with the ground he treads, but with the people who are sons of the soil.

So far, we in Norfolk have come on no traces of that stage in the development of civilisation which the lake dwellings of Switzerland afford. We have not come upon them because we have not sought for them. But clear and unmistakeable traces of such remains were detected by Mr. Harry Jones at Barton Mere, in the neighbourhood of Bury St. Edmund's, twenty years ago; and, though a man should never prophesy unless he is sure, standing in this place to-day I venture to predict that before the institute visits Norfolk again, remains of the *Phahlbauten* will be found in that district in the middle of the county of Norfolk which now serves as the watershed of the Yare and the Stoke river, where once half-a-dozen or so of lakes were to be found, of which the South mere at Hingham and the meres of Saham and Scoulton are but the shrunken remains.

But archæology does by no means confine her scrutiny of the past to such remains as are exclusively pre-historical, nor, indeed, does she end her researches where written testimony of ancient records begins. There is an enormous mass of raw material which the archæologists will have to work up and interpret for the historian, which consist of actual documentary evidence hitherto neglected or very imperfectly examined. Quite new fields of enquiry have been opened out to archæology during the last few years since men of learning and patient research have begun to busy themselves with the history of early institutions, and with speculations upon the origin of society, the tenure of property in land, and many other kindred questions of the profoundest importance. We have here, in this county, I suspect, many more instances of divided ownership of land than is generally known. No part of England can furnish so many anomalous instances of strange tenures binding on the tenants of a manor, or more unexplained customs whose origin points to a very distant past. Few parts of England are so rich in what are called family papers—*i.e.*,

chests of documents of unknown antiquity which remain to be explored—and already the enlightened jurists of our time have begun to see clearly that the history of early law in England, and the history of a great deal else, will have to be re-written, and that the records to be examined and laboriously studied are to be found not exclusively, and perhaps not mainly, in the great public muniments of the national collection.

It would occupy far too much time to-day if I were to attempt to lay before you anything like a comprehensive account of the great problem which is now exercising the minds of students, and which may be briefly epitomized as the question of the origin of the Manorial System in England. Did the manor spring out of a village community of freemen—a co-operative society—where all were equal in status and all were equally owners of a certain area which they tilled in common for the behoof of all. Or did it originate in a settlement planted by a chieftain with his dependents who won the land and cultivated it for the lord at his bidding. And again, are we to look upon the manor as an institution which is a survival of the Roman domination or was it Teutonic in its origin? So again with regard to the jurisdiction and procedure and authority of the local courts, the courts baron and courts leet, and the rest. The accepted views of the great lawyers of the seventeenth century are in process of being severely cross-examined. Only during the last few months have we been startled by the announcement made by no less a man than Professor Maitland, of Cambridge, to the effect that he strongly suspects that the very word *court leet* is East Anglian, and that the thing itself is to be found before the twelfth century in Suffolk and Norfolk exclusively. I am fully persuaded that the constitutional history of England, in some of its earlier chapters, offers riddles for solution which can only find their answers in our private collections of original documents. What is wanted is for these treasures to be collected into Provincial centres, guarded by responsible custodians, and gradually examined, arranged, and calendared. Not till this is done will archæologists (the pioneers of historical research) have fair play, or

history have a chance of winning solid conquests from the dark places of the past. How much may be done by single students adequately furnished for the work of research, working alone among the archives of a single city; how much such a scholar may achieve if the sources of history are made readily accessible to his enquiries, how much light he may throw upon the history of the development of municipal institutions in England, in a comparatively short time, when the documentary evidence is made ready to his hand—all this I am prepared to hear this morning.

In anticipation of many a lesson which I am eager to receive, and you too are, I doubt not, curious to listen to, I forbear from intruding any longer upon you. I have only one word to add. I believe that no study—no branch of literature I may say—has presented to the cultured classes in this country during the last few years more fascinating attraction, or is becoming more and more extensively popular, *i.e.*, is engaging the attention of more eager and intelligent votaries—than the study of the life of the past in our own land. The progress we have made during the last forty years in our knowledge of the civil, the religious, the constitutional, and economic history of England has brought about a revolution in our opinions and our sentiments on a hundred different questions about which our grandfathers never troubled themselves at all, but which have forced themselves upon us. The advance in our knowledge of man and of his doings cannot but go on. History will not continue to be the random medley of ballad and legend, of gossip and guess work that it was only a little while ago. Such history can serve no better purpose than the song of the scald or the troubadour, sometimes rousing our passions, sometimes beguiling an idle hour. The more clearly we know the truth about the ages that are behind us, the better shall we be able to understand the present, and to shape our course in preparation for that future which some day we, or those that come after us, may hope to forecast more intelligently and more confidently than our present ignorance will admit of. For the light that gleams from the dimness of one horizon flashes too upon the dimness of the other, and

if it be true, as it is, that the boy is father of the man, not less true is it that the growth and development of our race must needs proceed according to some great laws of progress. The unnumbered generations of those that were, each of whom added something, to the aggregate of human experience, were all, consciously or unconsciously, acting their parts in that great drama which the children of men are destined to play out upon this little world of ours.