OXFORD AS A FACTOR IN THE PROGRESS OF ARCHÆOLOGY.[1]

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Perhaps as coming from Oxford, it might be agreeable if I were to say something about the contributions which Oxford is making to history on its archæological side. These are much too numerous to be mentioned in detail, but there are at present, besides many indirect ways, no less than three distinct methods by which this work is being done at Oxford in a direct form and in a public way. Taking them in priority of formation these are the "Oxford Architectural and Historical Society," much more archæological than anything else; the new "Oxford Historical Society," and the Readership of Mediæval Palæography. It would be too much to say that, under these methods, and, indirectly, by the rapid growth of the School of Modern History, with its apparatus of Professors, Readers, Tutors, and multitudes of Lectures, Oxford is becoming the centre of archæological study;—for London, Cambridge, and perhaps other places, have equal or superior claims of their own; but its progress in the educational direction of such studies may be at least a new subject of interest to some of your members, though no doubt familiar enough to many.

The Oxford Architectural and Historical Society, though the oldest, requires less notice than the younger institutions. It was called originally the "Society for promoting the study of Gothic Architecture," which was founded some half a century ago. Between the different stages of its progress the late Mr. J. H. Parker, formed perhaps the most continuous link. He may fairly be considered one of the chief founders of that science of Architectural History which has become nowadays so

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widely spread. We can hardly bring ourselves to believe that what is now the property of thousands, the common inheritance of educated men, was then confined to a few so-called enthusiasts, such as the men who established this and the Cambridge Camden Society. The Oxford Society has been chiefly educational and local. It has indeed included in its annual volumes of "Proceedings" not a few valuable papers; but its main work, its characteristic work, has been and still is, to arrange each term excursions in Oxford and its neighbourhood for successive generations of under-graduates, who cannot fail to learn under the masterly guidance of men like Mr. James Parker, the Treasurer, the rudiments of archæology as taught from examples on the spot. The clergy of the diocese have learnt not a little by these visits to their churches, and a public opinion has been formed which now effectually forbids within this area the barbarisms which have been deplored in too many "restorations." The undergraduates do not, however, form the majority of the excursionists or attendants at meetings, which is made up of ladies and citizens, and which thus aids to popularize this species of knowledge. Nor should it be forgotten that the Society has of late years found a welcome home in the renovated and beautified apartments of the Ashmolean Museum, crowded with noble antiquities, the study of which is itself an education. This it owes to the zeal and goodwill of Mr. Arthur Evans, the distinguished son of a distinguished father.

The new "Oxford Historical Society" is probably better known to your members, some of whom are no doubt amongst its subscribers. It was only founded in 1884, but it has already done a great work under the skilful management of the secretaries, the chief of whom is Mr. F. Madan, Sub-librarian of the Bodleian Library. Its object is purely literary, and it is confined to the elucidation of Oxford history, the history both of the City and of the University, but of course vastly the most in connection with the latter. A palpable movement in this direction was in the act of taking place when, strangely enough, life and form were given to it by the death of Mr. J. R. Green, the historian, and by the publication of a paper of his which proved a sort of literary legacy.

In this paper he recommended the institution of a Society for the purpose of collecting into one body all the documentary knowledge which modern research is now bringing to light, and so preparing the way for a history of the University and City of Oxford, worthy of our advanced age. In answer to this call a council was formed, and a subscription list was opened. Already some eighteen goodly volumes have been the result. Priceless MSS. of Anthony Wood, and of Thomas Hearne have been excellently edited for the first time; some College histories have been written, and others are in progress; the history of the Oxford Market, a truly venerable history, has just come out; and the antiquity of the University has been effectively discussed. The Registers of the University have been printed and noted by competent hands, and the lists of books current in the infancy of the Renaissance, have been unearthed from the secret hiding-places where they had been lying for nearly four centuries. One of these has been exposed to the light, and has undergone the searching identification of experts. The latest and not the least interesting of these discoveries has been the list of books belonging to the "Father of English Learning," William Groeyn. It was found last year amongst the archives of Merton College; and it is hoped that the light which this discovery has thrown upon the career of the man may have the effect of drawing attention to his extraordinary claim on our respect and admiration, too long neglected, and indeed forgotten;—for I need not say that the history of the English Renaissance has yet to be written. It is, perhaps, only one out of many such revivals of lost literature still in store for us. Talk of the discovery of an arrow-head, of an antique statue, of an Egyptian mummy! What are these discoveries of dead things to the rehabilitation of a great name, the name of one from whom, unknown to ourselves and unsuspected, we have received an intellectual inheritance, and whom we can bid to walk the earth once more? It is a sort of resurrection. Let us hope that the day is not far distant when the preliminaries will be concluded, when the materials for Oxford history will be gathered in, when we shall have found out all that can be found concerning those who have made the history of Oxford, and when, finally, the writer shall come to the

front who can use the style of Hume and Robertson, a style too long lost in the hurry and profusion of a widely, but not deeply, educated age.

Both of these institutions above described have local aims; the third, to which I now call your attention, has a general object. Only last year the University resolved to take steps towards the cultivation of a knowledge of mediæval orthography, or to use the larger term which has been officially selected, "palaeography." It was induced to do so by the conviction that a very large part of our ignorance of mediæval history and archæology arose from the simple circumstance that only a few people possessed the power of reading a mediæval manuscript. Still further, it was represented that many intelligent and zealous people were not aware of the simple fact that they must master this alphabet, this key, this "open sesame" of mediæval literature, before they could grapple with the contents of the casket. They often ventured to make the attempt, if chance or inclination led that way, with a light heart; but the difficulties soon discouraged them; they were often misled and fell into many a trap, or at best made but slow progress, and lost many an opportunity which could never come again. We all know, indeed, that sundry books have been written by experts which profess to teach the art of reading mediæval MSS., and they are, indeed, much better than nothing; but then their real use is to most people rather as books of reference than as primary instructors. All this having been pointed out by those who had gone through the long and painful processes of self-instruction—none the worse in such cases for being long and painful—the University has established a Readership for this express purpose, and has fortunately found exactly the right man for the place in Mr. Falconer Madan, already mentioned for his services to the "Oxford Historical Society." He has formed a considerable class of students who pursue with him a regular course of study, tracing the changes of orthography from one age to the other by the help of the vast stores accumulated in the Bodleian Library, thus laying a solid foundation on which students can afterwards build for themselves.

I look on this as a very much greater step in the

progress of archæology than would appear at first sight; and strongly suspect that mediaeval palaeography will before long find a place as a special subject in our Modern History Examinations, which is the only method of bringing anything to the front in our Oxford system. I am happy to say that this study is finding favour with the ladies at Oxford, as well as with graduates and a sprinkling of undergraduates. When the men find out that the ladies can decypher a mutilated inscription on a brass, or emerge triumphantly out of the difficulties presented by the crabbed hand of an Elizabethan parson in a parish register, depend upon it the men will follow. When an army of experts of both sexes is engaged in opening out the treasures which are still to be found all over England; when our own people discover half the zeal in these pursuits which distinguishes our American kinsmen—the history of England will become a very different thing from what it is now.

And this brings me to the conclusion of my paper. I have spoken of the direct ways in which Oxford contributes nowadays to the progress of archæology, both specially as regards Oxford and its neighbourhood, and generally as a teacher of the archæological alphabet of English literature. And I may add by the way that as nobody can make use of this key, when he has found it, without some practical knowledge both of Latin and French, the study of mediæval orthography has the advantage of encouraging a liberal education. Latin and French open out many more things than archæology; but people are sometimes found to complain that they do not see what good their youthful labours to acquire these languages have done them. If such labours enable them to make ever so small a contribution to English History that question is answered; and I need hardly tell the members of this Institute that the progress of archæology, in the largest sense of that word, is placing us under the serious obligation of re-writing the History of England, and its mediæval portion in particular.

To those who have not been personally concerned in the teaching of English History to grown-up people for many years, it will appear almost incredible that such a phrase should be applicable at the present day, when so

many first-rate men have written works which command respect and even admiration. But if we fully consider, not only how the historians of past times copied from one another without independent research, but still more, how the original facts have been distorted and coloured by the channels through which they have come down to us, we shall at least perceive that a great deal has to be done before we can get at the truth. We must gratefully admit that a great deal has been done, but we are quite mistaken if we fancy that any one generation of men can claim to say that they were "born to set it right." To recover the whole truth is a slow process; but there is movement. Specialization, division of labour, multiplication of Societies, and international rivalry in literature, are working many changes.

It was thought for example a great feat not long ago to make a fresh and careful study of the monastic annalists who were so scornfully treated by the writers of the last century; but the original documents which tell us the very facts, independently of the monastic colouring, have only recently been brought to light; nor were the numerous side-lights thrown by contemporary writers observed as they have been since by several authors. The first fruits of the new harvest are being reaped and stored by some of the writers of the numerous little books forming the various historical series which have become the fashion, and by some of the compilers of the small histories for schools; and I think I may also claim for the University Schools of Modern History, both of Oxford and Cambridge, that they are gradually concentrating into a focus the various rays of light which are forcing their way through the darkness. Before long, as I said about the history of *Oxford*, the man will arise to whom public opinion will willingly delegate the task of putting the history of *England*, from beginning to end, into a proper shape—fair and honest, bright and readable shape, for the next generation.

But much of the coming man's material is yet to be discovered. The Historical MSS. Commission has not by any means completed its valuable labours. The trifling amount of money annually placed at the disposal of the Record Office is forcing an able and energetic body of officials to be deplorably slow in the publication of its

invaluable deposits. If I may mention one of its most important treasures, in which I am particularly interested, the Gascon Rolls—a mass of documents which when published, will, I believe, cause a marked difference in the treatment of English history—has been hitherto left to the energy of the French, with scarcely any aid from England; and only in the current year do the difficulties attending a joint enterprise of this sort, such as is now contemplated, show decided signs of a solution. The truth is that while no country possesses richer stores of documentary literature, few spend less money upon making use of them. Buried in the recesses of the Record Office, they are almost useless. Few countries have made such efforts in the cause of national education, but they have not been accompanied with the proper corollary, a generous expenditure on the means of providing the teachers of the schoolmasters and mistresses with the materials which would raise the standard of historical education to its proper height. Some fifty years ago Sir Thomas Duffus Hardy and his friends did, as we all know, persuade the Government of the day into the exercise of a wise and noble liberality in these matters; and the great collections they produced during a very few years (the *Inquisitiones post mortem* and the rest) have been the foundation of every archæological effort of an historical kind which has been made since. But how distressing is it to remember that the Government became so terrified at the expense of these publications that they were summarily and almost immediately stopped! There they stand on our shelves, like some time-worn monument of a former age, the evidence of a generation of giants who lightly threw a rock which it would require more "than ten strong men of this degenerate age" even to lift. I am glad to be able to announce that there are signs of a more liberal treatment of this subject on the part of the Government, and certainly in the one case of the Gascon Rolls; but if it is to display itself generally, depend upon it the call must come from such Societies as this, and from a change in public opinion which will have to be created by your efforts.

These are the considerations which seem to me to deserve a place at an archæological meeting, believing, as I

do, that your Society does not profess to rest satisfied with excursions and with mere interchange of opinion, but that it has for its object the solid growth and progress of its subject. Nothing short of this could justify the existence and position of such a Society. At least so it seems to one who has no claim to any previous connection with it, and who owes the privilege of being allowed to address you on this occasion to the circumstance that your Council did him the honour to ask him to become one of your Vice-Presidents.

It has come to be a common formula, when a discussion is barren of practical results, to call it "academical." Let me hope that I have left upon my hearers the impression that the relation of Oxford to archæology is not only truly academical, but eminently practical.