

## Obituary.

THE REV. R. M. SERJEANTSON, M.A. F.S.A.

In Robert Meyricke Serjeantson, rector of St. Peter's, Northampton, who died on 15th November at Acton Burnell rectory, near Shrewsbury, the Institute has lost one of its most valuable and active members. He was the elder son of the Rev. William Serjeantson, and was born in Herefordshire, where his father held the curacy of Titley, on 10th October, 1861. His family was of Yorkshire origin, from Hanlith in the parish of Kirkby Malham, and he recorded its history in a privately printed work, *The Serjeantsons of Hanlith*. He was educated at Rossall school and at Keble college, Oxford. In 1883 he took his B.A. degree with a second class in history, proceeding to his master's degree in 1892. He entered Ely Theological college in 1885, and was ordained deacon in 1887 and priest in 1888. His only curacy was at St. Sepulchre's, Northampton, where he remained nineteen years. In 1906 he was presented by Queen Alexandra to the rectory of St. Peter's. During the early autumn of this year, soon after returning from a holiday, he had an attack of gastric fever. He recovered sufficiently to leave Northampton for his father's at Acton Burnell in October; but here he suffered a relapse and died of exhaustion of the brain. He was buried at Acton Burnell on 18th November.

During the twenty-nine years which he spent at Northampton, he identified himself closely with the life of the town and neighbourhood; and the historical studies by which he became widely known outside were only one feature of a singularly useful and unselfish life and were closely connected with his sense of duty as a citizen and parish priest. While curate of St. Sepulchre's, he turned his attention to the ecclesiastical history of Northampton and produced in 1897, in collaboration with Dr. Cox, a history of St. Sepulchre's. This volume was followed by

histories of All Saints' (1901), St. Peter's (1904), and St. Giles's (1911), exhaustive works of original research which, in clearness of arrangement and simplicity of style, as well as in their accurate presentation of facts, are models of what such books should be. He also published at intervals, for the most part in the *Journal* of the Northamptonshire Natural History Society, historical accounts of Northampton castle, of the priory of St. Andrew and the abbeys of St. James and Delapré, of the six houses of friars in Northampton, and of the hospitals of St. John and St. Thomas. All these papers are marked by the same care and thoroughness. Fresh documents may in process of time be added to those which he collected and published from various sources; but his work as the historian of the religious life of Northampton can never be superseded.

He was fitly chosen to be the editor of the Victoria County History of Northamptonshire, to which he contributed, in partnership with Sir Ryland Adkins, the chapter on the ecclesiastical history of the county. He also found time to collect a large amount of material for the topographical portion of the work. One valuable result of his researches is the number of lists of incumbents of churches which he compiled for many of his friends among the Northamptonshire clergy. The lists made by the earlier historians of the county, Bridges and Baker, were singularly excellent, so far as their medieval portions were concerned. He was able, however, to correct and add to these in no small degree; while, for the post-reformation period, he obtained abundance of new material in the hitherto imperfectly explored diocesan records at Peterborough. As a member of the Northampton and Oakham Architectural Society, he contributed several valuable articles to the *Associated Architectural Societies' Reports and Papers*. These include *A Mediaeval Legend of St. Peter's, Northampton* (1907), *The Church of Oundle* (1909), *William de Rothwell and his Brass* (with F. W. Bull, F.S.A. 1910), *The Origin and History of the de Senlis family and The Restoration of the long-lost brass of Sir William Catesby* (1912), *Sanctuary Seekers in Northamptonshire* (1913-1914), and an article on *The Court Rolls of Higham Ferrers* (1915), the sequel to which has yet to appear.

In 1907 he was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and in the following year he joined the Archaeological Institute. His interest in ancient buildings was as keen as his appreciation of their purely historical side, and he became a regular attendant at our annual meetings, where his unaffected good-comradeship and solicitude for the happiness of others gained him the esteem and affection of all. He was elected a member of council in 1911, and, when the Institute visited Northampton in 1912, much of the success of the meeting was due to his unsparing pains as local secretary. At this meeting he described the Northampton churches and the interesting village church at Cogenhoe, and read a paper upon the history of Northampton. His article, written with the help of the Rev. H. Isham Longden, upon *The Parish Churches and Religious Houses of Northamptonshire: their Dedications, Altars, Images and Lights*, with its very complete apparatus of extracts from mediaeval wills, occupies 236 pages of vol. lxx of the *Archaeological Journal*, and is a monument of his patience and skill in documentary research. He retired from the council in 1915, but was re-elected for a further term of service at the annual meeting in 1915. He was also a member of council of the Canterbury and York Society, a fellow of the Royal Historical Society, and had recently been elected to membership of the Royal Numismatic Society.

The spirit in which his historical and archaeological work was undertaken was a key to his character. He wrote in order to interest and stimulate others, without the least thought of the reputation which his writings might bring him. The work recorded here was done in the short intervals of a busy life, devoted to the duties of his parish, to the spiritual charge of the Northampton infirmary, and to the assistance which he gave ungrudgingly to his brother clergy. His visits to the Public Record Office and the manuscript room of the British Museum were moments of recreation snatched from the ministrations which he always regarded as his chief business. Even at these times, his mind was full of his fellow-students. Any passage in a document which might interest or help a friend was carefully noted down and despatched at the first opportunity; and his passion for helping others was

accompanied by a singular generosity in acknowledging the help, even of the slightest kind, with which his beneficiaries were not slow to respond. It is pleasant to know that, in the neighbourhood to which he devoted his life and gifts, his work as an historian met with ample recognition. The full extent of his labour among original documents could hardly be recognised by those who had no experience of work of the kind; but its results were at any rate appreciated. Among his benefits to the town of Northampton, not the least was the foundation of the society known as the Architectural Excursions Club. Its members, drawn almost entirely from teachers in elementary and secondary schools and from people engaged in business, were conducted by him seven or eight times every summer for some years together to places of interest in various parts of Northamptonshire; and its successful activities were interrupted only by the outbreak of the war. It was necessary to attend these crowded meetings, at which every one was anxious to learn and profit, to realise the influence which he had over the community for which he worked. On such occasions, he used his knowledge as a learner among learners and inspired a zeal which greater eloquence and a fuller consciousness of his own powers might only have damped and discouraged. His humility and simplicity of character and his unobtrusive readiness to serve others were patent to all. He possessed in full measure the scholar's dislike of pretentiousness and of the show of knowledge without the reality; but his judgments were sane and carefully restrained, and for any student, of however small capacity, who was genuinely desirous to learn, he had endless reserves of kindness and patience. No member of the Institute will be more sincerely regretted than this good man and excellent scholar, by whom, amid his many engrossments, its best interests were never forgotten; while, to those who enjoyed his intimate friendship, his loss is irreparable.

A. H. T.