



Obituary

THE LATE MR. JOHN PARSONS EARWAKER, M.A., F.S.A.

JOHN PARSONS EARWAKER was born at Cheetham Hill, near Manchester, on the 22nd of April, 1847. His father, Mr. John Earwaker, who survives him, came about fifty years ago from the village of West Meon, in Hampshire, where his family had resided for several centuries, and settled in Manchester with another West Meon man, the late Richard Cobden, M.P., in whose house in Quay Street, Mr. Earwaker, Senior, lived for many years, and with whom he was intimately connected in business.

The late Mr. J. P. Earwaker was educated at a private school at Alderley Edge, at which place his father then lived, and was afterwards sent to a school in Germany. On his return to England, he studied for several years at Owens' College, winning several prizes in Natural Science, and afterwards went to Pembroke College, Cambridge; but obtaining a Scholarship at Merton College, Oxford, he migrated there in November, 1868. In 1872 he took his degree, gaining a first-class in Natural Science. At this time he had a few pupils, and remained at Oxford until 1874, keeping most of his terms at the Inner Temple, though he was never actually called to the Bar. It was during his residence in Oxford that his love of archæology, born among the old churches and halls of East Cheshire, was developed; and the active part which he took, as its Honorary Secretary, in the management of the Oxford Archæological Society, soon brought him into close intimacy with the late John Henry Parker, C.B., during whose residence in Rome, in the years 1873-4, he was appointed to the responsible office of Deputy-Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum.

In January, 1873, he was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and subsequently held the office of Local Secretary of that Society for Cheshire and North Wales for a number of years.

On the first of June, 1875, he married Miss Juliet Bergman, a daughter of Mr. J. G. Bergman of Colinshays, near Bruton, in Somersetshire, and sister of the late Major-General Herbert Bergman, of the 19th Punjaub Native Infantry, which went through the last Afghan Campaign. By her he had three daughters and three sons, all of whom survive their father.

In 1875 he went to reside at Withington, near Manchester, and during the rest of his life devoted the greater part of his time to literary and archæological work. His earliest publications appeared in the "*Manchester Courier*," under the title of "*Local Gleanings*," from April 1875, to January 1878, and were eagerly looked forward to each week by many persons interested in local history. These contributions were reprinted in two volumes, which were followed in 1879-80 by the "*Local Gleanings' Magazine*," a more ambitious publication, of which only one volume appeared, as its Editor had become too busily engaged in writing his important work on the history of "*East Cheshire*" to admit of justice being done to the smaller publication. As one who spent many pleasant weeks in company with the Author in the acquisition and working up of materials for "*East Cheshire*," the writer can confidently say that with Mr. Farwaker that work was indeed a labour of love. With characteristic energy and thoroughness, he overcame all obstacles to procure from the fountain-head each item of information that he required; and even when a second journey across the county was involved to compare a doubtful word on a monumental inscription or to re-inspect a puzzling entry in a parish register, it was willingly undertaken.

In this work he was ably supported by his wife, whose graceful and accurate drawings so greatly add to the interest and value of these two handsome volumes. No expense was spared to secure absolute accuracy and completeness as far as possible; and, rather than avail himself of the published work of others, he largely increased the cost of gathering materials for his book by using only fresh copies of original documents, for the most part made by himself at the Public Record Office, the British Museum, and the Probate Registries, or in the muniment rooms of the local landowners and the vestries of the old parish churches. It was in this spirit that he worked. He was, in fact, one of the first of those whose persistent habit

of giving and requiring the authority for any statement has set an example which has made the old style of inaccurate "traditional" local history a thing of the past.

The second volume of "*East Cheshire*" appeared in 1880; and in 1881 Mr. Earwaker removed to Pensarn. Here, besides devoting a considerable part of his time to public matters in his capacity of Chairman of the Local Board, President of the large and flourishing Lawn Tennis Club (his own creation), President of the Conservative Association, and Churchwarden of Abergelge, he occupied himself with literature and archæology as a profession. He produced what may well be called a monumental work in the "*Manchester Court Leet Records*" and "*Constables' Accounts*," which are printed in fifteen large volumes copiously annotated, and are too well-known to need description here. He also published valuable contributions to Cheshire history in his "*History of Sandbach*" and "*Roman Remains at Chester*," both of these works being beautifully illustrated by his wife; and besides these he printed a number of pamphlets dealing with some of his favourite subjects, among them an excellent account of the family of the Randle Holmes of Chester, and their manuscripts; and another on the old Deeds preserved at Agecroft Hall, near Manchester. But probably the books proceeding from Mr. Earwaker's study which are the best known and most widely used, are the seven volumes of the Index to the Wills at Chester, from 1545 to 1760; a work involving an immense amount of labour, which he edited gratuitously for the Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society. These volumes, to outward appearance, contain only mere dry lists of names with dates; but their value to students of local history is incalculable, and their popularity among working antiquaries is one of the gratifying evidences of that exactness in modern genealogical research which contrasts so favourably with similar work in days gone by, when it was not sought to draw up a true pedigree but a pretentious one.

He also edited a series of Abstracts of Wills for the Chetham Society, and completed the editing of the Visitation of Lancashire, 1533, commenced by the late William Langton, for the same Society. He contributed a number of interesting papers to the Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and

Cheshire, the Chester Archæological and Historic Society, and the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society; and not infrequently was a contributor to the "*Athenæum*," the "*Academy*," and "*Notes and Queries*."

As one of the founders and Honorary Secretary of the Record Society, and as a Member of the Council of the Chetham Society and of the respective Councils of the three other Societies just named, his advice and help will be much missed, and he will long be remembered with kindly feeling and profound respect by a large circle of friends with many of whom he was for upwards of twenty years associated in the work of garnering materials for the true history of the twin Counties Palatine. Had his life been prolonged, it was his intention to attempt to write an entirely new history of the County of Lancaster, a task which would have appalled many a less ardent worker, but for which his extensive local knowledge, unusual abilities, and active temperament, peculiarly fitted him; and he only waited the completion of the "*History of St. Mary's Church, Chester*," upon which he was engaged at the time of his death, to begin what would have been the crowning work of a life honestly devoted to bringing into the light of day what could be learned of the people of "the days of old and the years that are past." With this object in view, he had formed Lancashire collections, both in manuscript and in print, which are unequalled by any other in private hands of a like kind, unless it be by his own truly magnificent library of Cheshire manuscripts, printed books, engravings, maps, broadsides and pamphlets. It is to be hoped that these treasures, the result of years of careful and critical search in almost every part of the kingdom will be preserved together as a monument to the memory of their accomplished owner and for the use of the public, and that public spirit will intervene to prevent them from being scattered and their value and usefulness lessened in the auction room.

Mr. Earwaker was a man always willing to afford help, so far as lay in his power, to those who were working on his own honest lines; but with careless, unconscientious, or insufficient work he had no sympathy and little patience. A labourer in the field of Archæology, who is now engaged upon an important local work, writes:—"He was a great friend to me, and helped

and encouraged me at all times, in such wise that I shall never cease to think of him with kindly memory as one of the best friends I ever had."

His last illness began in the autumn of 1894, and ended fatally, at Pensarn, on the 29th of January, 1895. On the 2nd of February, when the ground was white with snow, he was laid to rest in the old Church-yard of Abergele, in the presence of his family and a very large number of friends and neighbours, who will not readily forget the solemn service, the powerful effect of the sweet voices of the Welsh choir, the soft music of the muffled peal, and the marked respect and sympathy shewn everywhere throughout the town.

J. P. R.

