

ADDRESS GIVEN AT THE STOW SERVICE (April 6th, 1949)

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IN that chapter from the Apocrypha which was read as our lesson the author asks us to give our meed of praise to the heroes of history. And in that category he includes not only the "captains and kings," but the poets, the musicians and the men of learning. So we feel that we have ample justification for placing high up on London's roll of fame John Stow, citizen and Merchant Taylor, to whose black-letter Survey all later London historians are so deeply in debt.

It was a wonderful century, the sixteenth, into which John Stow was born, and during the last three-quarters of which he lived. Was there ever a century with more famous—and infamous—men and women, or with more epoch-making events? It has been well called the watershed between mediæval and modern England; it was the age of the Renaissance and of the Reformation.

Only a few years before it began Christopher Columbus, sailing from Spain, and John and Sebastian Cabot, sailing from Bristol, called into being a new world destined, on three historic occasions, "to redress the balance of the old"; or, as a greater than Canning put it: "to step forth, in all its might and power, in God's good time, to the rescue and liberation of the old." Only a few years before the invention of printing quite revolutionised Europe. Instead of a limited number of MSS. collected in cathedral and monastic libraries for the most part, suddenly the west of Europe was flooded with tens of thousands of books. No wonder that William Caxton said, as he set up his printing-press in Westminster: "With these twenty-six leaden soldiers I can conquer the world."

In 1525, the year of John Stow's birth, Tyndall published his English version of the New Testament on the continent of Europe, and for the next few years he was hurrying to complete an English Bible. Treachery and cruelty brought him to the stake, and his last words were a prayer that God would open the eyes of the King of England. His prayer was soon answered and Henry VIII gave an order to place a copy of the English Bible in every parish church in England. In the words of John Richard Green, the people soon became a people of one book—the Bible.

When Stow was 24, another splendid gift was made to the English-speaking people in the form of our incomparable Prayer Book, which we owe chiefly to Archbishop Cranmer, Bishop Ridley and Miles Coverdale. Two of them shared the fate of Tyndall. Only a bare month ago the 400th anniversary of the first printing of the Prayer Book was celebrated. Stow witnessed all this; and he saw with regret the destruction of the monasteries that almost completely surrounded mediæval London, and was sorry to see the loss of so much that was sacred and beautiful and useful. He also saw the lighting of the fires of Smithfield.

He heard of the loss of Calais and, like Queen Mary, was sad to think that the last of our overseas possessions had gone; and he must have met some of the refugees from Hammes and Guines, who settled down, not far to the east of the church where we are worshipping, in a district which the illiterate Cockney soon called "Hangman's Gains." Stow heard with joy of the defeat of the Armada, when God "blew with His winds and they were scattered." He must have heard of the doings of the famous sea dogs, though he never seems to mention them in his writings. He heard of fresh settlements overseas to east and to west, which have culminated in what we call to-day the British Commonwealth of Nations and the United States of America, and he watched the flowering of that prose and verse and drama that made so glorious the later years of Queen Elizabeth and culminated in the triumphs of William Shakespeare.

John Stow was essentially a Londoner. He was born in London; he lived all his life here, and he very seldom strayed far beyond its borders. He was educated at one of the local schools, where they taught him, no doubt, "small Latin and less Greek," as they did to others of his contemporaries. He was a man of deeply religious character, and loved this church of St. Andrew, in which his forbears had worshipped for many generations. He was proud of his association with Archbishop Parker, 70th in direct succession from St. Augustine of Canterbury and the link between pre-Reformation and post-Reformation England. He did valuable service in collecting, cataloguing and translating MSS. for Parker, and it is rather surprising that in an excellent recent broadcast on Matthew Parker no mention was made of Stow.

He also worked with William Camden, schoolmaster, historian, archæologist and, like Stow and Parker, a member

of the old Society of Antiquaries. Camden's *Britannia* deserves a place on our shelves side by side with Stow's *Survey*. Camden was a generous soul and gave a very acceptable pension to Stow, as did also the Merchant Taylors' Company.

When, two years ago, Dr. Bouquet gave the address from this pulpit, he mentioned with satisfaction that his family was descended, collaterally, from John Stow. May I venture to mention with equal satisfaction that our family is descended, also collaterally, from William Camden, Stow's friend and benefactor.

This is the 25th Service of Commemoration to be held in this church for John Stow, and the idea seems first to have occurred to one of our members, Allen Walker. It was taken up so readily by the rector and churchwardens that it now seems to have become a permanent institution. Perhaps the most distinguished historian who has spoken at this service was Walter Bell, whose books on the Plague and the Fire have the same permanent value as those of Stow and Camden.

Walter Bell was especially interested in the ceremony of the Quill Pen. As you know, in a few moments the Lord Mayor will place a new quill pen in the hand of John Stow, so that the work of writing London's story may go on for another year. What happens to the old quill pen? That was what worried Walter Bell. I was re-reading only this morning a letter which he wrote to me between the wars, making several suggestions as to its use.

During the last few years an excellent custom has sprung up of holding a competition among the London schools for the best essay on London. The winner, Audrey Gittins, of Bishopshall School, Uxbridge, will receive a bound copy of Stow's *Survey*, and the quill pen in a suitable case will go to the principal of the school that produces the prize-winner.

All this ceremony would have appealed enormously to John Stow. He would have been delighted to see the congregation worshipping in his almost unscarred church. He would have cordially approved of the effort to interest the rising generation in the story of London; and he would have been greatly impressed by the presence here of the Lord Mayor, the Lady Mayoress, and so many of London's city fathers—and mothers; and he would have realised that to-day, as in his time, and before and since, London demands and receives from her sons and daughters love, loyalty and lifelong devotion.