

CITY ARCHÆOLOGY: A RETROSPECT AND A GLANCE FORWARD.

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BY

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THE approaching Jubilee of our Society affords a suitable opportunity for a review of the progress of archæology in the City of London during the past fifty years. This Society may claim to be one of the earliest local archæological societies of which there are so many, each doing excellent work, at the present day. Whilst the Society of Antiquaries and the other two large societies, the Archæological Institute and the British Archæological Society, dealt with archæology in its wider sense, it was not till the year 1855 that a society was specially established to occupy the rich field which London and Middlesex present to the antiquary. If it is true that London streets are paved with gold, it is equally true that her paving stones and the dust beneath them can a story unfold, which, if read aright, will tell more truly than written chronicles the story of the doings of London and its citizens through ages long since passed.

Previous to 1855, this great field was occupied only by solitary workers whose labours were not only independent of, but often clashed with, those of each other. The advantage of co-operation in these studies was seen by a few earnest City antiquaries,

such as the Rev. Thomas Hugo, Dr. W. H. Black, Mr. Alfred White, Mr. J. G. Waller, who, in 1855, established the London and Middlesex Archæological Society. The objects of this Society were defined as follows :

To collect and publish the best information on the ancient arts and monuments of London and Middlesex, including primeval antiquities, architecture, painting, civil and legal antiquities, heraldry, genealogy, costume, numismatics, charitable foundations, records, etc. To encourage and record the results of investigation of excavations for railways, foundations of buildings, etc. To oppose and prevent as far as possible the removal of or injury to monuments or ancient remains which may from time to time be threatened. To hold meetings for reading papers, and exhibition of antiquities to illustrate subjects connected with the purposes of the Society.

These objects have been consistently kept in view. One of its first public functions, only six years after the Society's formation, was the arrangement of a Loan Exhibition of works of art, held by the kind permission of the Ironmongers' Company, and with the cordial co-operation of its members in this beautiful hall in which we are now assembled. To this exhibition, *almost*, if not *actually* the first of its kind, the Master has already alluded. It shed a lustre both upon the Company through whose generosity it became a possibility, and upon the Society whose work it did so much to advance. We now, after a lapse of over forty years, meet here once more, a new generation of us, both Company and Society, and in view of approaching changes

we may say *Te morituram saluamus*. In but a few years there will arise Phoenix-like from the ashes of the present building, which has been so excellently described by Mr. Nicholl, another hall of fair estate more useful to this great Guild, and more worthy of the historic treasures which it will be its purpose to enshrine.*

Another object, not specifically included in the above, was the education of the public mind, and more particularly of the citizens of London, in a love for archæological studies, the value of relics of past ages as historical evidences, and that sympathy which would prompt to the preservation of objects of archæological interest which were in danger of loss or destruction. To this latter object meetings such as that we are privileged to be present at this evening, have very largely contributed. The generosity of the great City Companies in throwing open their halls to receive the members of the Society and their friends on these "off nights" as they may be called, have contributed far beyond their apparent result in fostering a love of archæology in the minds of guests of various rank and station in City life. A visit to one of these noble halls with its priceless treasures of antiquity is in itself an archæological education. In several instances the visit of the Society to a Company's hall, and the papers read upon its history, have led to the preparation of a printed history of the Company.

A comparison between the popular appreciation of archæological pursuits at the present day and

* The necessity for rebuilding Ironmongers' Hall, which then appeared inevitable, has now happily disappeared. C. W., December, 1904.

the prevailing opinions of fifty years ago will show how notable is the advance that has been made. A gentleman who pleaded for the better preservation of the City's records and their publication would not now be accused of "poking his nose into mediæval dustbins," as was Mr. Orridge by the late Sir John Bennett, somewhere in the sixties. On the contrary, the taste for archæological pursuits has become so general as to be at times quite embarrassing. Keepers of museums are inundated by youths and persons of older years, who wish to know the value of their collections of coins, which usually consist of battered copper money of the later Georgian period, modern coins of Russia, China, etc., 18th century tradesmen's tokens, and a few Roman third brass of commonest type thrown in to give the necessary flavour of antiquity. The private collector who acts on his or her own judgment also falls an easy victim to the Whitechapel forgeries made by Flanagan and his associates about forty years ago. These fearful objects, which most frequently take the shape of discs or flattened out medals with loops for suspension, bear the rudest of effigies surrounded by the wildest combination of letters and figures. They might very suitably be offered by some enterprising journal as subjects for prize competition, as no solution of their *meaning could by any possibility be found*. One of these precious objects is exhibited by Colonel Pearson this evening as a useful guide to the unwary collector. But to the private collector, nevertheless, the cause of archæology is greatly indebted for its advance in special departments. It is to his efforts that our museums are largely indebted for their most

precious possessions. The late Mr. John Walker Baily, a household name in this Company, borne too by the Master who has graciously received us this evening, is an admirable example of the private collector. The archæological treasures gathered by that distinguished antiquary have found a suitable home in the Guildhall Museum.

With regard to the preservation of ancient monuments, one or two considerations suggest themselves. Whilst it is highly important to save our ancient City landmarks from loss or destruction, it is, I venture to think, of still greater importance to preserve them *in situ*. A notable instance is that of the Boy in Panier Alley. The house on which this well-known London monument is fixed, has lately been pulled down, and many were the enquiries which I received as to when the stone would be removed to the Guildhall Museum. Having been consulted upon its disposal, I strongly urged that it should be restored in the new building to a position identical if possible with that which it occupied in the old. This course is not, of course, always possible, and the next best is to preserve such relics in a public museum, where they are not only safely preserved, but are also available for comparison with objects of a like character.

Much may yet be done to help in this direction, as there are still many old house signs, property marks, and street names, still existing in London which are in danger of being carted away as rubbish when the houses on which they are fixed are demolished. Another piece of archæological work, on behalf of which the voice of the antiquary should be urgently raised, is the preservation of old deeds, and

especially old plans, relating to City property. When we consider what a great destruction of public records was made by the Great Fire of London, the importance of rescuing all that remains of historic interest will be readily recognised. These documents are for the most part of no legal value as evidences of title at the present day, and are in constant danger of wholesale destruction when lawyers' offices and private muniment chests have to be cleared of so-called rubbish.

Another work of pressing need is the publication of the parish registers of City churches. A good start has been made in this direction by the Harleian Society and by private editors, Mr. Hovenden, the Rev. W. C. Hallen, Mr. Briggs, and others, but the great majority of the registers still exist only in their original manuscript form, with all the attendant risks. It seems unnecessary to emphasise the importance of this work, as the citizens of London have been founders of families throughout the English-speaking world. The only satisfactory way of accomplishing the work is probably the formation of a separate society for this special purpose.

Perhaps the most pressing need of London archæology in its present stage is the tabulation and arrangement of results already obtained, which are scattered through so many publications and public and private collections. Could some systematising genius be found among the London antiquaries like, say, Mr. Charles Booth, there is no question that the result of his labours would be to save the waste of duplicate effort, to replace in many quarters fable by fact, to present the true problems that await

solution, and to furnish in an accessible form all the evidence available for their determination.

I must apologise for this imperfect sketch, but this is neither the time nor the place for a detailed survey of the progress of London archæology, or of the work of this Society.
