

STOW COMMEMORATION,
ST. ANDREW UNDERSHAFT,
16TH APRIL, 1926,

ADDRESS BY
WILLIAM CHARLES EDWARDS

On behalf of the London and Middlesex Archæological Society.

WE meet here to-day to worship God and to call to memory a very famous citizen, John Stow, who long worshipped in this very house of prayer and whose mortal remains were committed for safe keeping to this sanctuary on 8th April, 1605, 321 years ago.

Stow was born, 1525, in the parish of St. Michael, Cornhill, and at the time of his death was about 80 years of age. His life almost spanned the sixteenth century and that was perhaps the most important century in our national history. Stow's writings help us to picture those times. He lived under five Sovereigns. When he was born, some of the purple glow of the Renaissant dawn still lingered in the sky. He lived to see it "fade away into the light of common day." We usually associate the Renaissance with the fall of Constantinople—that sad morning when, about 8 o'clock, 29th May, 1453, the Turkish hordes broke through the feeble defences and Constantine, the last Greek Emperor, fell heroically defending his throne and capital.

The fugitive scholars who fled to the Venetian ships in the harbour, thus escaping massacre or slavery, came begging their bread at the doors of the Universities of Europe and found an honourable welcome. This event almost exactly synchronized with the introduction of printing about nine years earlier. In 1444, Gutenberg had begun to print his

Bible; in 1477, Caxton set up his printing press in Westminster; in 1476, the first Greek Grammar was printed at Milan and very soon the literary masterpieces of Greece were keeping busy many printing presses. What I think woke up the sleepy ages more than anything else was a series of great geographical discoveries, viz., in 1432, the discovery of the Azores by the Portuguese; 1486, the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope; and finally 11th October, 1492, the discovery of America by Columbus. This last event was like new wine to a waking giant. With the discovery of the New World came a new age to the Old.

In Stow's boyhood, London was still mediaeval but the City was growing and grew apace during his lifetime. This is his description of its growth eastwards:—"This Hog Lane stretcheth north towards St. Marie Spital without Bishops-gate, and within these fortie yeares had on both sides fayre hedgerows of elm trees, with bridges and easie stiles to pass over into the pleasant fieldes, very commodious for citizens therein to walke, shoote, and otherwise to recreate and refresh their dull spirites in the sweete and wholesome ayre, which is nowe within a few yeares made a continual building throughout, of garden houses and small cottages; and the fields on either sides be turned into garden plots, teynter yarges, bowling allyes, and such like from Houndesditch in the west so far as White Chappel, and further towards the east.

On the south side of the highway from Ealdgate were some few tenements, thinly scattered, here & there, with many voyd spaces between them, up to the bars, but now that street is not only fully replenished with buildings outward, & also pestered with diverse allyes on eyther side to the bars, but to White Chappell and beyond."

Great Nobles still lived in the city. "Richard Nevill, Earle of Warwicke," writes Stow, "with 600 men all in red jackets imbrodered with ragged staves before and behind, and was lodged in Warwicke Lane; in whose house there was oftentimes six oxen eaten at breakfast and every Taverne

was full of his meate, for he that had any acquaintance in that house might have there so much of sodden and rost meat as hee could pricke and carrie upon a longe dagger." Cavalcades of great Lords and retainers all in gay liveries were continually passing through the ancient city, but twenty years before Stow died they were giving place to lumbering coaches which carried what remained of the old nobility as well as the wealthy merchants or the *nouveaux riches*. Besides the mansions of the great Lords and merchants there were in and around the city many wealthy monastic institutions. Stow tells us that "These priors have sitten and ridden amongst the Aldermen in livery like unto them—saving that his habit was in shape of a spiritual person as I myself have seen in my childhood at which time the prior kept a most bountiful house of meat and drink—both rich and poor as well as within the house as at the gates to all comers according to their estates."

When Stow was a lad of 13 all these monasteries and nunneries were suppressed and monks and nuns and pilgrim bands ceased and vanished from the scene like a dream. In those times, living was very cheap and, given bountiful harvests and freedom from pestilences, England was "merrie England" indeed. There was a farm, belonging to a nunnery off the Minories and Stow tells us "at which farme I my selfe in my youth have fetched many a halfe penny worth of milk and never had less than three ale pints for a half-pennie in the sommer nor less than one ale quart for a halfe pennie in the winter." In this very Church of St. Andrew, Stow says that in the year 1547 eighty pints of Malmsey wine cost ten shillings. Bread was generally cheap and meat also. We read that:—"Beef by enactment did not exceed $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per lb., Mutton $\frac{1}{2}$ d. and half-farthing, a fat ox 26. 8d. at the most, a fat wether 3s. 4d. and a fat calf the same, a piece of beef $2\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. for a penny" and then, adds Stow "what the price is now I need not set down." When Stow was a boy of eight he might have seen Anne Boleyn one June

morning ride in her coronation procession. At 10 he might have seen the bonfires of Bibles. Soon after Stow came of age, 28th January, 1547, Henry the 8th died. He was a popular King. Lord Herbert of Cherbury in analysing his character writes:—He did not know what it was to be beaten all his life. He was counted the Umpire of Christendom. In fine, England may be said to have had little commerce abroad in matters of state till the reign of this King. Six years later, 6th July, 1553, at the early age of 16, the beloved Edward the 6th died and Mary began her reign marred by persecution and burnings and the Country humbled and impoverished by the loss of Calais. She died aged 43 on the 17th November, 1558. Then began the long and glorious reign of Elizabeth. Stow saw the rejoicings of that great deliverance, the destruction of the Armada. The Spaniards said we won because we were better sailors but England awed and solemnized by her wonderful deliverance attributed the victory to God alone. Henceforth England went forward confidently upon the path of Empire convinced that God was on her side.

In 1564, Shakespeare was born and four years before Elizabeth died (1603) that great ruler of men, Oliver Cromwell, saw the light in 1599. In 1591, we made our first venture to the Indies and nine years later the Queen gave the Charter that formed the great East India Company. Through all these epochs Stow, the keen observing recording chronicler, lived and worked, and wrote. He began life as a tailor; 25th November, 1547, he took up his freedom in the Merchant Tailors' Company. He sometimes gives tailors measurements, e.g., tells us the length of St. Paul's in tailor's yards; but it is not safe to judge a man's character by his trade—that is simply his means of sustenance. You must measure a man not by his trade but what he does with his spare time. In his trade a man often works because he must; but in his spare time he does what he likes and does it *con amore*. Stow spent his spare time in studying old

deeds and conning over ancient chronicles. About the year 1556, he appears to have left his trade and devoted his whole time to literature in order to give his country a history. It is a little difficult to explain where and how Stow got his education. He wrote good English, knew French, and had considerable knowledge of Latin, and in places tries some Greek and once at least quotes Anglo-Saxon from a Saxon charter of Edward the Confessor. Well, if a boy is determined to learn and get on he generally gets somehow the education he deserves. Probably he first learnt some Latin by following the services of the church. I like to think that possibly the minister of this very church helped the youth in his thirst for knowledge and determination for self-improvement. His first known literary venture was in 1561, when, at 36, he issued an edition of Chaucer. About four years later, 1565, he published the first of many editions of his *Summarie of History*, a small black letter pocket volume with a calendar for the year and many succeeding years, and much useful information besides. He gives a bibliography like any modern writer and names the authors of the translations which he consulted. It was Stow's ambition to do for us what Tacitus and others had done for Rome. After fifteen years of intense toil having gathered more materials he expanded his *Summarie* and published his *Annales*. In 1598, when about 73 years of age, the first edition of his famous and invaluable *Survey* appeared. These works do not exhaust the tale of his labours. He was entrusted by Matthew Parker, the Archbishop of Canterbury, with many commissions to make for him important investigations and especially to purchase for him Saxon MSS. Stow himself was a collector of MSS., and the moment was propitious. The dissolution and demolition of the monasteries scattered to the winds many ancient and long neglected libraries, the writings of centuries of monkish scribes were thrown to the winds and left to the mercy of the weather. One almost weeps to read of tons upon tons of vellum writings sold to bakers to

fire their ovens. Many of these would to-day fetch thousands of pounds. Stow and his friends must have salved many of these treasures. I have lately been handling some of Stow's papers and collections. His library must have been a fairly large one. In 1569, he being suspected of possessing treasonable documents, his house was searched and found to be *full* of MSS. and books of old learning and religion. Holinshed's History contains some of Stow's work and since that History was the source of some of Shakespeare's dramas it is worth noting that Stow was thirty-nine when Shakespeare was born and Shakespeare was about forty-one when Stow died. Stow was a great friend of the famous Camden, one of the Headmasters of Westminster. Ben Jonson was a Westminster boy under Camden—indeed his favourite scholar. Young Jonson calls the Chronicler "honest old John Stow." It seems impossible to believe that the friend of Camden and Jonson could have been personally unknown to Shakespeare himself and if known not to have had some share in supplying some facts and some of his philosophy of history to the great dramatist. In a small place like London every bookseller and every scholar must have known Shakespeare and been known by him. Howes tells us that Stow was always mild and courteous to any that required his instruction. It might be a suggestion to some painter to paint a picture of the world's greatest dramatist conferring with the venerable John Stow. No doubt Stow considered that his greatest work was the *Annales*; but he lives and will live by his famous *Survey*. It is written in pleasant readable English upon a simple but comprehensive plan. He devoted the last years of his life to revising and improving it and in 1603 brought out the final edition. It remains and will remain a mine of valuable and reliable information. With the *Survey* in hand you may still go round most of the City, ward by ward, as Stow did nearly 400 years ago. Feeling his end nearing he writes in the 1603 Edition:—"I have been divers times minded to add

certain chapters to this book, but being (by the good pleasure of God) visited with sickness, such as my feet (which have borne me many a mile), have of late years refused, once in four or five months to convey me from my bed to my study, and therefore could not do as I would. At length, remembering I had long since gathered notes to have chaptered am now forced to deliver them unperfected, and desire the readers to pardon me, that want not will to pleasure them."

Stow outlived almost all his contemporaries and had to apply for pecuniary assistance to his Company who granted him a small annuity. His loving friend Camden gave him an allowance of £8 per annum. When James the 1st came to the throne he appealed to the new king for help and this is what he got—a license to beg.

Thank God we have a more generous King whose ear and heart and hand are ever open.

Ten years after the death of Stow, Edmond Howes published a new edition of the *Annales* and thus describes our old friend:—

" He was tall of stature, lean of body and face, his eyes small and chrystaline, of a pleasant and cheerful countenance, his sight and memory very good; very sober, mild and courteous to any that required his instructions; and retained the true use of all his senses unto the day of his death, being of an excellent memory. He alwayes protested never to have written anything either for malice, fear, or favour, nor to seek his owne particulare gain or vain glory; and that his only pains and care was to write truth; he never could ride, but travelled on foote unto divers Cathedral Churches and other chief places of the land to search records; he was very careless of scoffers, backbiters and detractors. He lived peacefully and died of the stone Collicke, being four score yeares of age."

In all the editions of the *Survey*, Stow has this prayer with which we also may well conclude:—

“Almightie God (qui nisi custodiat civitatem, frustra vigilat custos) grant that her Majestie evermore rightly esteeme and rule this Citie, and he give grace, that the Citizens may answere duty, as well towards God, and her Majestie, as towards this whole realme and countrey, Amen.”



James, by the grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ire-
land, defender of the faith &c. To all our welbeloued Subiects, greeting.



Whereas our louing Subiect, John Stowe (a very aged, & worthy
member of our city of London) this fine & forty yeres hath
to his great charge, & with neglect of his ordinary meanes of
maintenanc (for the generall good aswell of posteritie, as
of the present age) compiled and published diuers necessary
bookes, & Chronicles; & therfore we, in recompens of these his
painfull labourts, & for encouragement to the like, haue (in our
royall inclination ben pleased to graunt our Letters Patents

under our great seale of England, dated the eightth of March, 1603. therby authoris-
zing him, the sayd John Stowe, and his deputies, to collect, amongst our louing Sub-
iects, their voluntary contribution & kinde gratuitie; as by the sayd Letters Patents
more at large may appeare: Now, seeing that our sayd Patents (being but one in them-
selues) cannot be shewed forth in diuers places or parishes, at once (as the occasions, of
his speedy putting them in execution, may require) we haue therfore thought expedient,
in this vnusuall manner, to recommend his cause vnto you; hauing already, in our owne
person, and of our speciall grace, begun the largestte, for the example of others.
Giuen at our palace at Westminster,

Fr. of St Mary Woolchurch Lane London
Fm the Lyford family of Lyford

By John Browne

