

JOHN STOW COMMEMORATION.

THE annual service to commemorate the life and historical researches of John Stow was held on 30th April, Lord Mayor and Sheriffs, with the City Officials, attended 1929, at the Church of St. Andrew, Undershaft. The in state, and were received by the Alderman and Deputy-Alderman of Aldgate Ward, by the Rector of the Parish, the Rt. Rev. Bishop Perrin, D.D., and the Churchwardens. At the last moment, the Chairman of Lloyd's and the Chairman of the Baltic were unavoidably detained, and were unable to be present at the service. Special prayer was offered for Dr. William Martin, who was then lying dangerously ill, on what proved to be his death-bed. Major Richard Rigg, O.B.E., T.D., J.P., read the lesson, and Mr. Walter G. Bell, F.S.A., F.R.A.S., gave an admirable address on the life and work of Stow. His address is printed below. The usual procession to the Monument to John Stow then took place, and the Lord Mayor placed the customary quill-pen in the hand of the effigy.

Mr. Walter Bell's address:—

“John Stow, in the marble effigy of his monument in that corner of the church, sits writing, and he has sat there for over three hundred years. Every student of London knows the book he is writing. There is no student of London who has not drawn information—and what is of much more importance, who has not drawn inspiration—from his book.

The Surveigh of London first appeared in the year 1597 in the gothic black letter we find it so hard to read. It is a great time ago. Queen Elizabeth's long and glorious reign was drawing towards its close. The old man, I imagine, was happy that year. There is

happiness of an exalted order when one first sees the fruition of many years of arduous labour in the attractive form of print, good margins, and tasteful binding.

It was a successful book. It reached a second edition in 1603, which Stow lived to revise, and in the seventeenth century after his death, and in every succeeding century, there have been several new editions and enlargements.

Like Isaak Walton, and Samuel Pepys and John Bunyan, Stow has left to us an English classic. That he died in poverty we know. Much has been made—I think too much—of the fact that in Stow's declining years King James I granted to him a brief, or licence, to beg.

That was not a heroic end to a life's toil; but, after all, in literature has it been unusual?

I feel sure it was no phantom of riches that urged John Stow to write. Dull, indeed, would be the mind, then or now, which expected to make a fortune out of such a book as the *Surveigh of London*. He had the love of London, his native city, in his soul. He was jealous of her renown, desiring her greatness. That he should have raised a monument to London fulfils high ambition.

I imagine there would be no happier man than Stow could he know to-day that his work has endured; and that, after three centuries, the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs come to this church—his church—to pay him honour.

In this case the book is the man. Scholars like the late Mr. C. L. Kingsford, who four years ago stood in my place, have added to our knowledge many particulars of Stow. But we derive practically all that we wish to know from the pages of his *Surveigh of London* and his *Annals*—his eager search for truth, his care to preserve the records of this city, his unsparing industry, which is an example to all.

Not least are we indebted to John Stow for the

intimate glimpses he gives of the London of Elizabeth's age, that now seems so far remote. Of Houndsditch in his boyhood, for example:—

'Towards the street " (he writes) "were some small cottages, of two storeys high, and little garden plots backwards, for poor bed-ridden people, for in that street dwelt none other, built by some Prior of Holy Trinity, to whom that ground belonged. In my youth I remember devout people, as well men as women of this city, were accustomed oftentimes, especially on Fridays, weekly to walk that way purposely to bestow their charitable alms; every poor man or woman lying in their bed within their window, which was towards the street, open so low that every man might see them, a clean linen cloth lying in the window, and a pair of beads, to show that there lay a bed-ridden body, unable but to pray only.'

That was old Houndsditch, and it is so different to-day. Not far distant the sight of the dismantled house of the holy Nuns of St. Clare in the Minories, with little beyond its church then left standing, revived in John Stow another reminiscence. I quote again:—

'Near adjoining to this Abbey, on the south side thereof, was sometime a farm belonging to the said nunnery, at the which farm I myself in my youth have fetched away many a halfpenny-worth of milk, and never had less than three ale-pints for a halfpenny in the summer, nor less than one ale quart for a halfpenny in the winter, always hot from the kine, as the same was milked and strained.

One Trolop, and afterwards Goodman, were the farmers there, and had thirty to forty kine to the pail. Goodman's son being heir to his father's purchase, let the ground first for grazing of horse, and then for garden plots, and lived like a gentleman thereby.'

Goodman's Fields you still may find in Whitechapel, but only the name; there are few kine to the pail within hail of Aldgate to-day. London, changed though it is, still exercises its lure, as three centuries ago it won the devotion of John Stow; and four centuries before Stow himself attracted the monk Fitzgibbon, who had left to us an almost idyllic picture of this old city of ours near the close of the twelfth century—too idyllic, I fear, to be quite true.

Nothing of Stow would we willingly dispense with.

But who would not give pages of his monastic history (which sometimes from fuller knowledge we correct) for more of these intimate thumbnail sketches of the London that aroused the wonder of the growing Tudor lad?

The Lord Mayor is about to place in the hand of that quiet figure of stone a new quill pen. And now let me pass on a suggestion. It has been a worthy custom of ours of recent years to institute prizes in literature, more valuable as recognition than as reward. There is the Franco-British prize—the *Femina Vie*—given each year for the best novel written by a woman of each nation. There is the Hawthornden Prize for the year's best imaginative work by a young writer—forty being accounted young. Happy those young men of forty! The Nobel Prize in Literature goes to some distinguished international figure.

Like others, I have wondered what becomes of the quills that are removed from the Stow Monument after their year's service. There is no prize for those who follow Stow's example and labour to elucidate the history of London; and the University of London does not, as in other great cities, English and Scottish, honour this city's own sons.

The quill placed in Stow's hand with the State to be observed to-day should not, after its year's service, be thrown aside. Shaft and feather, it could be gilt at trifling expense. Were a small committee to sit to adjudicate upon the best London book of each year, and award the golden quill, straight from Stow's monument, as a recognition of merit, the token, I feel sure, would be highly appreciated."