

ADDRESS AT THE STOW
 COMMEMORATION SERVICE, 1939

BY W. J. WILLIAMS,

Member of the Council of the Society.

WE meet to-day in this House of Prayer to commemorate by way of thanksgiving the life and works of John Stow, who was born in this city in 1525 and died there in 1605. He was interred in this his Parish Church on 8th April, 1605. His interesting and attractive monument stands in the north-east part of the building and with simplicity and art portrays the similitude of the man and indicates the nature of his work. It is a worthy memorial both as to design and execution. The little touch of realism which is added each year by the ceremonial placing of a new quill pen in the hand of the effigy, is one of those pleasant methods of continual commemoration which lend liveliness and actuality to our assembly.

That this ceremony should be performed by the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of this City is in accordance with the fitness of things.

The first edition of Stow's best known work, *A Survey of London*, was published in 1598, and the second in 1603. Both editions were dedicated to the then Lord Mayor.

The Dedication of the second edition was thus addressed:

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
 ROBERT LEE
 LORD MAYOR OF THE CITY OF LONDON
 TO THE COMMONALTY AND CITIZENS OF THE SAME
 JOHN STOW, CITIZEN, WISHETH LONG HEALTH AND
 FELICITY.

In the course of the dedication he proceeds thus :

“I have attempted the discovery of London my native soil and country, at the desire and persuasion of some of my good friends; as well because I have seen sundry antiquities myself touching that place, as also that through search of records to other purposes, divers written helps are come to my hands, which few others have fortunèd to meet withall; it is a service that most agreeth with my professed travels; it is a duty that I willingly owe to my native mother and country, and an office that of right I hold myself bound in love to bestow upon the politic body and members of the same.”

He closes by recommending his labours to their consideration, and himself to their service.

During recent years and at these services the minute details of his career and labours have been so amply, concisely, and accurately dealt with that on this occasion it seems permissible to deal with the subject in more general terms.

The “*Survay*” was the crown of his achievements. The long years of preparation for that task were occupied by editing the 1561 edition of Chaucer’s works and by these other works :—

Summary of English Chronicles in 1565. Five other editions in his lifetime.

Abridgements of that Summary (6 editions from 1566 to 1604)

He edited Matthew Paris’s *Chronicle* in 1571 and Walsingham’s *Chronicle* in 1574, and published the *Chronicles of England* in 1580, which he rearranged as *The Annales of England* in 1592, later editions being dated 1601 and 1605. He also edited Holinshed’s *Chronicle* (1585–1587).

Thus he was immersed in the study of English history and biography for at least 44 years of his life. In that atmosphere he lived and compiled and produced :—

A Survey of London Conteyning the Originall, Antiquity, Increase, Moderne Estate, and description of that City written in the year 1598.

This was the natural sequel to the books in which he

had recorded the doings of the people of England. Having thus shown who and what manner of people the English were, and their achievements and failures, it was only proper that he should put on record a description of the environment in which his countrymen, and especially his fellow citizens of the Metropolis, lived.

He generously recognised the merits of other topographers who had expended their labours on other parts of England. Such writers included William Lambarde as to Kent, John Norden as to Middlesex and Hertford, as well as his friend Camden, the famous author of *Britannia*.

He appended to his book a copy in Latin of a *Description of London* by William Fitzstephen (a monk of Canterbury born in the City of London) and written in the reign of Henry II, about 400 years before the "Survey" was written.

He embodied some striking passages from Fitzstephen in his own Survey.

The Survey was written in the nick of time, as it preserves for posterity a precise record of the buildings of the city, as they were carefully inspected by a painstaking and competent recorder about 70 years before the great fire of 1666 destroyed a very large proportion of those buildings. The church in which we meet just escaped.

I venture to suggest to those who have not yet read the Survey that a very useful edition of it is published in Everyman's Library at the price of 2s. Probably many who have attended these commemorations have not yet read the book we praise as they may think it hard and costly to obtain.

Stow lived for 80 years during one of the most eventful periods of English history. For 22 of those years Henry VIII was on the throne. Edward VI succeeded him in 1547; Mary in 1553; Elizabeth in 1558; and James I in 1603.

J. R. Green, the historian, states that "never had the

fortunes of England sunk to a lower ebb than at the moment that Elizabeth mounted the throne."

Stow from the age of 33 lived throughout the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth, during whose sway our land was thronged with famous men whose achievements in many departments of human activity were phenomenal; and so majestically took away the reproach I have quoted. It was an inspiring time. No wonder that Stow should be stirred up to chronicle the history of the land and survey the city in which he dwelt!

It is not trespassing too much on the imagination to deem it possible that he had joined in the words of Psalm 48: "Walk about Sion and go round about her and tell the towers thereof. Mark well her bulwarks set up her houses, that ye may tell them that come after." Well and worthily did Stow apply that counsel to this city. We are among "them that come after," whether we be those of riper years or of those who are now looking at the future through the eyes of youth.

The history of this city through the centuries shows how graciously the answer has been given to the prayer enshrined in the city's motto: *Domine dirige nos*. There may have been times when the element of response to divine direction has not been particularly prominent, but the results show that maintenance, development and rectification have been progressing. The devoted labours exerted by the City Fathers for the benefit of the affairs of this metropolis have been rewarded by *great results due to the combined, continuous, and conscientious work of those who have been its chosen rulers under God*.

Stow himself and Fitzstephen his predecessor have much to say concerning the provision made for the education of youth in their times, but in the last hundred years or so the facilities for education have increased and multiplied, and it is manifest that those who are at the helm of affairs are never better pleased than when they find that scholastic efforts in many branches are prosper-

ing and that the labour, thought and money expended are being amply justified by the efficiency of the pupils.

Here to-day in this great city we are by the very form of this service placed as it were in the midway between another city of ancient fame, "Jerusalem the City of the Great King" and the Holy City the New Jerusalem which is yet to come down from Heaven.

Before we depart the vow of high resolve will be solemnly uttered:—

"I will not cease from mental fight
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land."

Stow could only record past history and survey the London of his time; but we cannot rest there, nor did our ancestors do so. We attain so that we may aspire.

More than 300 years have elapsed since Stow departed this life, and many Chroniclers have supplemented his work. Perhaps also some Recording Angels! There have been changes, and so the London of to-day may differ in many ways from London as Stow knew it. Nevertheless, "The more it changes the more it is the same thing."

So we must call for the bow of burning gold and the arrows of desire and respond to the inscription on his tomb which exhorts us thus:—

"Either do what is worthy to be written
Or write what is worthy to be read."

By this he, being dead, yet speaketh.