

## JOHN STOW COMMEMORATION SERVICES

THE annual service for 1944 was held on Friday, 9th June, and was conducted by the Rt. Rev. Henry Montgomery-Campbell, M.C., M.A., Lord Bishop of Kensington, Rector. The lesson was read by William Wheatley, M.A., A.I.C., and the Address was given by the Rev. Edward C. Rich, M.A., Vicar of St. Nicholas, Chiswick. The Lord Mayor and Sheriff attended in State, and were received by the Alderman of the Ward, the Clergy and the Churchwardens. The usual procession was made to the Tomb of John Stow, and the Lord Mayor placed the new quill pen in the hand of John Stow's effigy.

### THE ADDRESS

BY THE REV. E. C. RICH

There is something strangely significant in the annual service of commemoration of the life and labours of John Stow. Other and greater men there have been; but Stow was the first to relate the history of this city and to record its antiquities. His work has become the fountain-head of all subsequent histories, and but for his painstaking researches our knowledge would be seriously defective as to the growth of London during the Middle Ages and into the New Age of commercial expansion. His lifetime extended over five reigns from Henry VIII to James I, the stormiest and most revolutionary period, socially, economically and culturally, in our history. Much that he records was in his own day ruthlessly swept away. The London on which he saw coming into existence was devastatingly destroyed in the Great Fire. The age in which he lived was a dangerous time, and men had warily to watch their step. Stow himself came under grave suspicion in 1569 because of the mass of old MSS. and books which he had collected from the monastic houses, and which led to a flimsy charge of leanings towards Popery. His preservation of priceless relics of the past give an element of heroism to Stow's quiet, painstaking labours. He was not so much a historian as a chronicler, but both kinds are needed; and he recorded the mighty changes that took place in his own lifetime and make us regret that so much of inestimable value and beauty in art and treasure and architecture was destroyed.

The days in which we live have some close kinship with the times of John Stow, for ancient landmarks are being destroyed, and new ideas are in the air. We, like Stow, know something of the pain and sorrow that the ruthless destruction of ancient buildings and customs creates. But "hope springs eternal in the human breast," and as we gaze at the ruins and devastation around us, we know that we have a chance of building a new London, fairer and nobler than in the past. Two such chances have occurred in the past; the first after the destruction of Rome in the 5th century, when the great St. Augustine of Hippo sat down and composed his inspiring treatise on *The City of God*. It was his vision that helped to shape the cities of mediaeval Europe, of which our City of London was a fair example. It was a society in which the Sovereignty of God was frankly recognised and in which religion was wholly integrated.

Mediaeval society was far from perfect, and it finally became corrupt and decadent. The period of the Renaissance and Reformation was a great opportunity for our forbears to reconstitute society on a Christian basis, and a citizen of London, perhaps the greatest Englishman who ever lived, Sir Thomas More, gave us in his *Utopia*, an ideal not without its potent influence in many modern movements. His book has been much misunderstood, but it is at last coming into its own. Unlike the *City of God*, *Utopia* is an allegory of the national order, whereas the other is a vision of the eternal and supernatural. In *Utopia*, More is giving a glorified picture of "the flower of cities all," and this is the London which Stow knew and loved.

Modern English society grew up in utter disregard of More's dream and ideal, and our city in particular has been allowed to reflect the want of any vision or pattern. The immediate future offers us a challenge and an opportunity as we seek to salvage the treasures of the past.

An eminent modern historian of Europe has declared that he fails to discern any "plot, rhythm, predetermined pattern" in history. He sees "only one emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave." In so far as this is true, it is accounted for by man's failure to co-operate with the Eternal Purpose of God.

A study of the past makes us realise how far short we have come of the goal set before us. But the past is never the

dead past and our characters are largely determined by our history. It is true that "the world passeth away" and that "here we have no continuing city." But, because "we seek one to come," we can each in his own way, and each generation in its turn seek to fashion his earthly city more in accordance with the Eternal City, "whose Builder and Maker is God."

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*The annual service for 1945 was held on Thursday, 7th June, under the same auspices as in 1944.*

The lesson was read by Commander G. Bridgmore Brown, R.D., M.B.E., R.N.R., and the address was given by the Very Rev. W. R. Matthews, D.D., Dean of St. Paul's, London. The Lord Mayor and Sheriff attended in State and were received by the Alderman of the Ward, the Clergy and the Churchwardens. After the Address, the usual procession advanced to Stow's Tomb, headed by the Verger, and comprising the Verger, the Sheriff, the Alderman of Aldgate Ward, the Lord Mayor, the Churchwardens and Clergy, the Lord Bishop of Kensington, and the Council of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society.