

OPENING ADDRESS,
DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING, 1854,
BY THE VENERABLE
ARCHDEACON BICKERSTETH,
Vice-President.

I believe it is expected from me that I should open the proceedings of this our annual meeting with a few remarks upon the general character and purposes of a society like this. I could wish that this duty were entrusted to worthier hands, but I rely confidently upon your kind acceptance of such observations as I may be able to offer. Indeed, the duties of my office as Archdeacon seem to claim from me some acquaintance with one branch, at least, of those studies which come within the scope of your investigations; and, with regard to the kindred subject of Archaeology, the opportunities continually offered me in my periodical Visitation tours may well encourage me to gain such knowledge as I can of the Antiquarian remains which lie around my path. I am anxious, therefore, to take this opportunity of assuring you of my sympathy with you in these pursuits; and so long as your Society conducts its proceedings with freedom from mere party or sectional aims, and with the enlarged and enlightened spirit of that Church with which its members are associated, I will gladly co-operate with you, as far as I can do this without prejudice to the higher claims of my order and my office.

I will trouble you with a few remarks upon the two studies embraced by your Society; and first, very briefly

with regard to Archaeology. Archaeology, (if I understand the term aright) comprises the pursuit of all that tends to illustrate history, or to increase our knowledge of the habits and manners of our forefathers. All those relics which time or disaster have spared to us come within its province; and even words, and names, and proverbs, and popular traditions, are of the number of those things with which it is conversant. It has been recently shown by Mr. TRENCH, in his excellent and very suggestive little work on the Study of Words, how much light may be thrown upon the history of our country by an intimate acquaintance with its language, so that we have set, as it were, and stereotyped in our words of daily use, the past fortunes of our land, and can trace out in these words our connexion with other nations, and the relations which we have held to them; aye! and even our moral history. And thus, too, do the patient researches of the Archaeologist, in another direction, reveal to us those material fragments and remnants which have come to us "tanquam tabulae ex naufragio," and by means of which we can construct the proofs, and furnish the illustrations, of the successive foreign occupations of the country. But I need hardly remind you that there are portions of our history still resting in much obscurity, and which offer, therefore, a wide field for research, Anything, for example, which tends to illustrate the period between the Roman and the Saxon dominations is of peculiar value, as exhibiting the influence exerted upon our forefathers by their first conquerors, and as illustrating the dawning period of the Church of Christ in our land. I may add, also, that we live in an age in which these relics are rapidly disappearing. The disturbances of the soil caused by the general enclosure and cultivation of waste lands, by the formation of railways, and by other circumstances, while they mark the onward march of improvement, have a direct tendency to sweep away what I may call the "materialism of antiquity:

Your Society may, therefore, be of eminent service in rescuing some of these memorials, in receiving and imparting light respecting them, and in treasuring up facts which may serve to enrich the pages of some future historian of the county.

The other study promoted by this Society is that of Architecture. Now, here it is with nations as with individuals. From time to time it has pleased God to raise up men whose characters and examples stand high above the average level of mankind—men who have been able to stamp their own impress so deeply on the age in which they lived, that no lapse of time has been able to efface it. And thus too, do we find that the intellectual character of a whole generation has been perpetuated through its own intrinsic excellence, whereby succeeding generations, sufficiently educated to enable them to appreciate the true and the beautiful, have been constrained to render homage to it. May we not affirm that they who cultivated the science of Architecture in the four centuries immediately succeeding the Norman Conquest have earned for themselves this distinction in their own particular science? Much has been written, and many conjectures put forth, upon the origin of the pointed arch, the characteristic feature of this style; but whether the discovery is to be referred to the accidental observation of the natural interlacing of the branches of an avenue, or to the intersection of the semi-circular arch, or most ingeniously to the requirements of vaulting,—or whether the account of its origin may be concealed in some unknown archives of the mysterious fraternity of freemasons—this, at least, is clear, that it sprung up almost simultaneously in England and in Italy, in Germany and in France. It is possible that its origin may be traced remotely to those changes in society caused by the admixture of the Northern races which overran and subdued the ancient Roman empire. The Norman Architecture has been described with some truth, but with

less praise than it deserves, as an awkward imitation of the Roman, or perhaps the Saracenic* It remained for the Architects of the succeeding period to construct out of this the beautiful outlines of what we call Gothic Architecture. And nothing can be more interesting than to trace the science in its gradual development through the chaste simplicity of the Early English period, to its perfection of beauty in the Decorated period, and then through its declining glory in the Perpendicular or Florid. But beyond this we cannot follow it. During the last three centuries a dreary blank is presented to us; and for us, who live in the most ancient period of the world's history†, it seems vain to expect any new style of Ecclesiastical Architecture. If ever this was to be looked for, surely it would have been during the last half century, in which we have been emerging from that un-intellectual age in which Archaeologists were ridiculed as dreamers, and in which the highest achievements of the science were, first to build a Church *like* a heathen temple, and then to *make it one* by crowding it with the representations of Pagan mythology. The attempt to introduce some of the ancient features of Norman or Roman, under the new name of Lombardic or Romanesque, though made in more than one instance with exquisite taste, and costly expenditure, seems to have been unsuccessful: and the multitude of Churches now rising on every side of us with the elegant and chaste proportions of our own Early English and Decorated, proves that this style of Church Architecture has taken fast hold of the English mind, and that in this respect, at least, we are content to follow humbly in the train of those masters of the science who have left us our magnificent Cathedrals,

* Hallam.

† And to speak truly "Antiquitas seculi, juvenus mundi." These times are the ancient times, when the world is ancient, and not those which we account ancient *ordine retrogrado*, by a computation backward from ourselves.—BACON. Advancement of Learning. Book I.

and our goodly Parish Churches, and the precious fragments of our Abbeys, as the monuments of their skill, and the memorials of their piety.

It seems then that in Architecture the highest wisdom of our age is to reproduce, and for this purpose we must go to the best and purest models, and make them our study. Not that we are to sink to the level of mere copyists, but that we should do with this science just as the wise student will do with the writings of our great masters of wisdom—namely, so to study them as to assimilate them, and to make them part and parcel of his own mind, and then to give them forth again, coloured, it may be, with his own genius, and fresh from his own fount of thought. Thus should we study these models of Architecture, so as to make the science our own, not taking any one example as though that were necessarily perfect in its kind, but comparing and contrasting the many and various examples around us, and determining by a diligent collation of them what is the best and highest perfection of the science. "Antiquity," says our great English philosopher, "deserveth that reverence, that men should make a stand thereupon, and discover what is the best way, but when the discovery is well taken, then to make progression." Most unwisely, therefore, would that Antiquarian act who would copy everything ancient merely because it was ancient, and make no distinction between the excellencies and the errors of the ages which have preceded him. Experience has taught us how the noble science of Architecture may be made to minister to error—how falsehood has its symbols as well as truth, and how the carved stone may but too faithfully represent the corruptions of the age in which it was chiselled. To reproduce these, therefore, is but to act over again the errors of our predecessors, and that too with the evidence before us of the evil source from which they sprang, and the fatal end in which they have issued. Many of us must have felt their spirits

stirred within them, to see how the clustered columns or the deep rich mouldings of some fine fabric of the 13th or 14th century have been chipped away to make room for the arrangements of the more corrupt age which followed; and then how, by the necessary law of reaction, Puritanical violence in the next succeeding age, whilst aiming its blow chiefly at the corrupt symbol, nevertheless has struck indiscriminately at all symbols alike. Our wisdom will, therefore, be to eliminate truth from error, avoiding the equally dangerous extremes of a morbid veneration for antiquity on the one hand, and a restless craving after novelty on the other. For it should never be forgotten that we have to mould the mind of the age which is to succeed us; and upon us lies the great responsibility of endeavouring to transmit that which is truth to them, with as little admixture of error as human infirmity will admit. We should learn wisdom, therefore, by the faults as well as by the merits of our predecessors, and give to our pure form of faith and discipline the advantages of the very best and purest Architecture, drawn from the best models of antiquity, and chastened and tempered by the genius and scholarship of our age.

But surely this is not the only end or the ultimate scope of our aims. "The greatest error," says Bacon, "is the mistaking or misplacing of the last or farthest end of knowledge; for men have entered into a desire of learning and knowledge, sometimes upon a natural curiosity and inquisitive appetite; sometimes to entertain their minds with variety and delight; sometimes for ornament and reputation; and sometimes to enable them to victory of wit and contradiction; and most times for lucre and profession; and seldom sincerely to give a true account of their gift of reason to the benefit and use of men; as if there were sought in knowledge a couch whereupon to rest a searching and restless spirit; or a terrace for a wandering and variable mind to walk up and down with a fair prospect; or a tower of state for a proud

mind to raise itself upon; or a fort or commanding ground for strife and contention; or a shop for profit or sale; and not a rich storehouse for the glory of the Creator, and the relief of man's estate."* And if this be true of all knowledge, how true is it of those pursuits with which we are engaged. It is undoubtedly an object of laudable ambition to strive to gather together such facts as may aid us in constructing a more exact and copious history of the past—it is surely an object worthy of our highest endeavours to search out what is the most becoming Temple in which to worship Him who of old inspired a Bezaleel, and an Aholiab, and a Solomon for this very purpose; for thus may we hope to bring men to esteem more highly the houses of God, and to regard them as the central points of their interest and affections. But we who desire to kindle these devout sentiments in others, must so pursue our studies as to make them the means of elevating our own character and raising our own moral tone. It would, indeed, be a sad result if our spirits were to slumber amidst the materialism of our work, and we were to accustom ourselves to trace a pedigree or examine a moulding without drawing for ourselves the moral instruction to which they point. Even the rusted ring of the Roman knight may tell us of the end of human ambition, for the earth has kept his ring that could not keep him ; and the little hoarded treasure, it may be, of the 13th century, which the ploughshare of the 19th century has revealed, may speak to us of some unprospered act of covetousness or of theft. And shall not our Architectural studies be rich in profit to us? Shall not each sacred Temple that we visit speak loudly to us of the presence and nearness of Him to whom it is dedicated? Such pursuits, are, indeed, full of moral and spiritual lessons. The mouldering fragments of some beautiful fabric may preach to us of the tendency to decay and ruin in the

* BACON. Advancement of Learning. Book I.

neglected spiritual Temple; while the restored Church, in its harmony and beauty, will tell us how even a defaced and dishonoured Temple of the Holy Ghost may be renewed and made once more worthy of His gracious indwelling. Moreover, the very form and pattern of our Churches, exhibiting a general uniformity of outline with great variety of detail, proclaims to us God's grand law of unity in the spiritual building, in which Christians, with all their varied detail of gifts and graces, are the living stones, cemented by love and faith to Him who is the head corner stone.

By thus pursuing our objects with an intellectual and spiritual mind, we may, indeed, be recreated in the full sense of that word, for we shall then bring back with us to our ordinary associations, and into the round of our daily life, such thoughts as may cheer and strengthen us; and aid us in the one great object to which every action of life should tend; even the building up of ourselves and each other in the strength of our common Lord, into the fair proportions and perfected glories of the everlasting Temple.