



The Berks, Bucks & Oxon Archæological Journal.

Gossip of an Antiquary.

WITH this number this Journal commences the fifth year of its issue. In looking through the list of original subscribers we regret to find how many old friends have been removed by death since it first sprang into being, whose place in the world it is difficult or impossible to fill. However, encouraged by the support of the lovers of Antiquity in the three counties, this Journal continues still to flourish and thrive, and we are glad to find that many have found it useful. New subscribers are requested to send their names to the Editor as soon as possible.

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The Lord Mayor of London recently invited us to the Mansion House to consider the proposed celebration of the Millenary of King Alfred, our great National hero, law-maker, poet, sage, scholar, and king. The commemoration will not take place until 1901, so that there is plenty of time for the consideration of the best means for adequately celebrating great Alfred's memory. The present proposal is to collect about £30,000 in order to erect a statue and to build a memorial hall at Winchester with a museum for the collection of the hero's relics. The question arises as to what will be the contents of this museum. We have no great store of Alfred's treasures. The cakes which he burnt have not been preserved as far as we can learn. Another question arises—ought not Berkshire

to have a share in this commemoration? Certainly, Alfred was born in Berkshire, at Wantage, where his statue stands. Here he passed his early days and laid the foundation of his future greatness. Here he fought the Danes and stayed the progress of their marauding bands. He lived in Berkshire far longer than ever he did at Winchester. Let Berkshire men therefore determine to have a share in this commemoration of their hero-king, and raise their own memorial to "England's Darling."

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Easter-tide has many strange folk-lore customs which linger on in spite of modern culture and the changed conditions of rural life. Still pace eggs are given, a custom far older than Christianity, and common to all Norse nations. In the old sagas the earth was symbolised by an egg; in the ancient worship of Baal eggs played a part; and the Christian teachers, finding that the people were devoted to the custom, diverted from it the old heathen notions and attached to it Christian ideas and beliefs. Egyptians, Persians, Greeks and Romans all shared in the symbolical use of eggs, and the Parsees even now distribute red eggs at their spring festival.

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Clapping for eggs is a Welsh custom. Lady Read sent me a few years ago a clapper used at Llanfechall by the children at Easter who sang the verse :—

"Clap, clap, dau wy
I hogyn bach ar y plwy."

the literal meaning of which is "Clap, clap, give two eggs to little lad on parish."

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There is a pace-egg or Easter mumming play resembling our Berkshire Christmas rustic performance. Folk-lorists see in this a relic of old horse mythology, the contest of Thor and Balder, of spring with winter. Beau Slasher is the champion of winter, and his iron head, steel body, and hands and feet of knuckle-bones, are descriptive of the frost-bound earth.

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I witnessed recently the carnival at Nice, a strange scene of wild hilarity, when the Nicois seemed to go mad with joy and revel to their hearts content. But the confetti—ugh! the recollections of the terrible plaster pellets are not pleasant. Something of the same

sort must have taken place in England once, as an old Puritan writer testifies :—

“Some run about the streets attired like Monks, and some like Kings,
Accompanied with pomp and guard, and other stately things;
Some like wild beasts do run abroad in skins, that divers be
Arrayed, and eke with loathsome shapes, that dreadful are to see;
They counterfeit both bears and wolves, and lions fierce in sight,
And raging bulls; some play the cranes with wings and stilts upright.”

Now we eat pancakes.

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“Passages from the Diaries of Mr. Philip Lybbe Powys, of Hardwick House, Oxon,” (A.D. 1750—1808) have been edited by Mrs. Climensson, and make an interesting volume, giving an admirable picture of the life of the gentry of that period. Life at Bath when in its glory, London life and amusements, masqued balls and plays at Lord Barrymore’s Wargrave Theatre, afford attractive peeps of life in the closing years of the last century.

Proceedings of Societies.

BERKS ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY. — The winter course of Lectures has for various reasons been abandoned this year, but a very valuable and interesting Lecture by the President, C. E. Keyser, Esq., F.S.A., on the Doorways of Berkshire Churches will be given on May 3rd, at 3.30, when the annual meeting will take place. The Lecture will be repeated in the evening. On February 2nd the Society in conjunction with the Literary and Scientific Society held a conversazione in the Town Hall. The Municipal Museum and Art Gallery were thrown open, portraits of worthies and other exhibitions displayed, and the Rev. Allan Cheales gave an interesting description of the ancient borough charters and the mace. There was a large gathering and a very pleasant evening resulted.