



The Berks, Bucks & Oxon Archæological Journal.

Gossip of an Antiquary.

With this Number a new volume of the Journal commences. Seven years have elapsed since we launched this adventurous bark on the stormy seas, and it has weathered the adverse winds of criticism, made several successful voyages, and I trust added some stores to the granaries of knowledge which year by year are being accumulated. The Editor desires me to express his gratitude to the many friends who have contributed valuable notes and articles to the Journal, and cheered his efforts in many ways.

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Looking through the volumes we find much that will be of use in compiling the new County History of Berkshire. But very much more remains to be done, and we desire to urge our Berkshire readers to set to work to write down all that they can gather concerning the history of their own parishes. The records of many villages are entirely blank at present. Much work remains to be done, and we need the co-operation of all who are patriotic Berkshire ladies and gentlemen.

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My library table is weighed down by many interesting books which have been sent for review. Last year, on account of the war, publishing languished; this Spring season promises to be a most prolific one, and is remarkable not only for the numerous volumes which have been produced, but also for their general excellence.

The first book which I take up is a very learned work by Mrs. C. C. Stopes on *Shakespeare's Family*, being a record of the ancestors and descendants of William Shakespeare, with some account of the Ardens (Elliot Stock). The authoress is well known as an enthusiastic Shakespearian scholar. Did she not most effectually answer the great Baconian theory advanced in Dr. Donnelly's *Great Cryptogram* and in other perverse books? With infinite pains she has traced the genealogy of our national poet, and collected every notice of the family, though none of the modern representatives of the race can be his descendants, and the family of his sister can alone now enter into the poet's pedigree with any degree of certainty.

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Much of the chaotic nonsense that has of late years been written to disparage the poet's character and contest his claims to our reverence and respect, are based on the assumption that he was a man of low origin and of mean occupation. Such arguments are of course absurd, for genius is restricted to no class, and we have a Burns as well as a Chaucer, a Keats as well as a Gower; but this book shews that these statements are unfounded assumptions. By the Spear-side his family was at least respectable, and by the Spindle-side his pedigree can be traced straight back to Guy of Warwick and the good King Alfred. There is something in fallen fortune that lends a subtle romance to the consciousness of a noble ancestry, and we may be sure that this played no small part in the making of the poet. Mrs. Stopes tells us about the localities of the early Shakespeares, of their coat of arms, of the Ardens, of the troubles of John, the poet's father, of his own life, of the Shakespeares of other countries, and many other important chapters of information relating to the family. Berkshire possessed some who bore that name. There was a John Shakespeare at Finchampstead, who made his will in 1644; and the Oxford members of the family were numerous. The book is rich with illustrations, and should be on the shelves of every Shakespearian scholar.

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The Millenary of King Alfred has produced several books, and not the least useful is *Alfred the Great*, by W. H. Draper (Elliot Stock). Much of the literature concerning our great Berkshire hero is overlaid with the laborious detail of excessive scholarship, or vitiated by the faults of careless or ignorant research. Mr. Draper's book aims at presenting such a faithful likeness of the King as may

stimulate among all citizens of England a just reverence for the great type of Englishman which it exhibits. It contains a clear account of the events and episodes in Alfred's life, and seven useful studies on his legislature, his learning, his local government, &c. I am glad to see that the author vindicates Asser's Life from the attacks of those who would assign it to a later date. There is no reason to doubt that it is a contemporary memoir of the King. Berkshire folk will read with interest the far too brief chapter on the Vale of the White Horse and Wantage. Mr. Draper does not seem to have any doubts about the site of the battle of Ashdown, and eschews controversy on the subject. He does not state absolutely that the White Horse was cut out by Alfred's men, and therein he is wise. The chapter on the materials for the history of Alfred is useful, and especial pains have been taken with the illustrations, which include many sketches hitherto unpublished of scenes and objects associated with this chapter of our national story. The book is written in a style which is interesting and pleasant to read.

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We turn from the Vale of the White Horse in Berkshire, and accompany the Rev. George Miller to the Vale of the Red Horse on the Edge Hills, and read his interesting book *Rambles round the Edge Hills* (Elliot Stock), of which I am glad to welcome a second edition. The author has had very favourable opportunities of research as he had access to the letters, papers, and notes of his ancestor Sanderson Miller (1715—1780), the friend of Brown Willis, Danes Barrington and other antiquaries of note. He gives a complete account of each parish in his district from Domesday to the present time, and records many curious local traditions, anecdotes and folk-lore gleanings. The style should please the present writer as it is certainly gossipy. Some of Mr. Miller's derivations are conjecturable. There are, I think, more relics of Celtic occupation than he seems to imagine, and was it Charles II. who is said to have knighted the loin of beef? In my ignorance I imagined that the story was told of James I., but that sirloins (more properly surloins) existed long before his day and took their name from the French *sur* (Latin *super*), *above the loin*. We can, however, forgive Mr. Miller much for the sake of his most lucid and interesting account of the battle of Edgehill. Many of the anecdotes are very amusing; the illustrations are good; and the book is very pleasant reading, and especially interesting to those who know the neighbourhood of which it treats.

I hear that a good find of silver coins was made recently near Hawthorn Hill, when an old house was pulled down. Some children took possession of the "bits of tin" and were playing with them when a passer-by discovered their value. Silver coins of Elizabeth to Charles II. were discovered, some almost unique. I regret that I was not passing by at the time of their discovery.

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The Vicar of Warfield tells me that he has found an old register book of his parish which has been lost for generations. It was hidden away in an old oven in the ancient Church House of Warfield. I congratulate him on his fortunate discovery.

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Mr. Cheales has woven a charming Romance called "The Siege of Reading in 1643," based on two diaries of worthy burgesses which have fortunately been preserved. The author has most successfully pieced the narratives together, and given a true picture of the life of a townsman of Reading, and of the stirring scenes that occurred in the most exciting period of its history. All Reading people will read the story with pleasure.

Proceedings of Archæological Societies.

BERKS ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.—On January 29th, a paper was read by the Rev. P. H. Ditchfield on "Berkshire Place-Names." We hope that it will lead to a thorough and systematic study of the origins of the names of our towns and villages in the County. Mr. Harold Peake has communicated some valuable letters to the Newbury papers on the subject, and the discussion is still in progress.

On February 14th, Mr G. Kempthorne read a valuable paper on 'The Devil's Highway in Berkshire, illustrated by magic lantern slides. The lecturer has kindly promised us a resumé of his lecture for the next number of the Journal.

On March 27th, the President will read a paper on the "Tympana of Norman doorways," and the annual meeting will be held on May 1st.

READING LITERARY SOCIETY.—The Rev. Alan Cheales gave an interesting lecture on Saxon Reading before the Society, a full report of which has appeared in the *Reading Standard*.