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Presidential Address

by C. E. Keyser
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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.

DELIVERED BY CHARLES E. KEYSER, M.A., F.S.A.,
*On the occasion of the visit of the Bristol and Gloucestershire
Archæological Society to Warwick, July 22nd, 1914.*

MR. MAYOR, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I feel it is incumbent on me to commence this address, which I fear must be brief, by a personal apology.

It was only about this time four years ago that the British Archæological Association, of which I was, and still am, the President, was most hospitably entertained by the Mayor and Corporation and other leading residents of this ancient borough and the neighbourhood, and a most enjoyable week was devoted to the inspection of the monuments of ancient and mediæval times with which this town and its vicinity abounds. Your excellent Vicar was especially attentive to our requirements, and with many others ensured the success of our meeting.

Last year, emboldened by the triumphal results of the previous congress, I ventured to bring a very considerable contingent of the Berkshire Archæological Society, of which I was, and still am, the President, and its sister Society, the Newbury and District Field Club, to again presume on the hospitality of the Mayor, the Vicar, and other kind friends, and once more under these favourable auspices two delightful days were spent in exploring the chief architectural and antiquarian objects in and within easy reach of this town.

And here I am again, for the third time in four years, in the new rôle of President of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archæological Society, fulfilling the pleasant duty of having to thank, partly in anticipation, his Worship the Mayor

and his consort ; the Vicar of Warwick, and many others, for the privilege of the welcome and assistance we are again receiving. While, perhaps, I can assure the Mayor that I am in no way responsible for the selection of this borough as the nucleus of our meeting, nor for the general arrangements, though I need hardly add I most heartily acquiesce in what has been done by my esteemed friend Canon Bazeley, the President, and the other members of the Council of our Society, I trust that my apparent importunity may be overlooked, and that instead of the cold shoulder being exhibited, the right hand of fellowship may once again be extended to me, as it was on the two previous occasions.

My main object to-night, as before, will be to express the gratitude and appreciation of our members to the Mayor and Mayoress for the kind and hospitable reception accorded by them to us, and to the other thoughtful friends who have joined in the welcome, and who intend to act as our guides during the three days we are spending here.

It may be interesting to our hosts to know that the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archæological Society owes its formation to the visit of the British Archæological Association to Bristol, on the occasion of the annual congress held there in 1874. No doubt the learned dissertations and the pleasant excursions acted as a stimulus to the local antiquaries to investigate more fully the numerous remains of British, Roman, Saxon, Norman and mediæval times with which the county abounds, and accordingly we find that on April 22nd, 1876, an inaugural meeting was convened under the presidency of the then Lord-Lieutenant, Lord Ducie, at which it was decided with much enthusiasm to form the Society under its present title. Sir William Guise, a keen antiquary, was elected the first President, and a large number of members enrolled. Sir William reminded his audience that twenty years before a society had been founded, but for various reasons it had not been a success, and before long it had ceased to exist,

and had delegated the various subjects of antiquarian and architectural interest to the Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club, which was already in existence at that time.

At the very outset the Society possessed many expert members, and it is therefore no wonder that, started as it was under such excellent auspices, it should have at once become a most powerful organisation, and have since steadily carried on the scientific research in the special field for which it was constituted. The City of Bristol yields to few of our great towns in the number and importance of the monuments of past ages to be found within its precincts, whilst the City and County of Gloucester are especially rich in the various objects which excite the enthusiasm of the ardent archæologist. Few counties can vie with it in its many existing evidences of the wealth and prosperity of the Romans during their occupation of this country in the first four centuries of our Christian era, nor can we find elsewhere so large a number of interesting churches mainly of the Norman and Perpendicular periods. As I pointed out in my Presidential Address on the occasion of the Congress of the British Archæological Association at Gloucester in 1912, it was little wonder that a county having within its borders the four great mitred Abbeys of St. Peter's, Gloucester; Tewkesbury; Winchcombe; and Cirencester; besides the less important monasteries of St. Augustine's, Bristol, St. Oswald's Gloucester, Hales, and others, and with other great monastic institutions such as Pershore, Evesham, Malmesbury, Bath, and others close on its borders, should be specially rich in its ecclesiastical architecture.

But our Society has been energetic and busy during the thirty-eight years of its existence, and almost every object of interest has been noted, and most of the places visited during the numerous excursions organised under its auspices; and if I may say so in his presence, it has shown wonderful vigour and ever increasing vitality under the beneficent guidance of Canon Bazley, the esteemed and

beloved President of the Council. It is impossible to overrate the advantage to our Society and the objects for which it was founded which have accrued from the services so willingly rendered, and I am sure it is the earnest wish of all our members that these services may be continued for many years to come.

A very admirable record of the work of the Society is preserved in its *Transactions*, and no less than thirty-five volumes have already been published, containing a comprehensive account of most of the objects of antiquarian and archæological value in the county. But the energy of the Society has practically compelled it to extend its researches beyond its own limits. It would not be right to say that the county has been exhausted, and that there is no further scope for excursions within its borders; but it has been deemed advisable to go farther afield, and afford the members the pleasure of seeing places of interest outside their own circle. What better or more popular scheme could have been devised than that which forms the venue of our present meeting. Warwick, which has been first visited, is a place of world-wide archæological reputation. Its baronial castle, with its commanding situation, is a relic of mediæval strength and splendour, and with its many and varied objects of interest stands out as the goal for many an ardent excursionist from America and other countries beyond the seas. The magnificent parish church, with its ancient crypt and beautiful chancel and Beauchamp Chapel, also invites a continuous stream of pilgrims; while the ancient buildings of Leicester's Hospital afford us an excellent example of a charitable institution of the Middle Ages. All these have already been visited by our members, who I am sure most fully appreciate the feast which has been provided for them, and has served to whet our appetites for the treat which is still in store for us.

To-day we have been privileged to visit Guy's Cliff, charming in its seclusion and replete with romantic associations;

and thence to Kenilworth Castle, with its fine Norman keep, the splendid banqueting hall of John of Gaunt, and the later buildings specially commemorating the sumptuous entertainment provided on the occasion of the visit of good Queen Bess; and forward again to Coventry, perhaps the most progressive town in the kingdom, full of ancient buildings, and likely once more to attain to the dignity of a cathedral city; and as a *pièce de résistance* we go to-morrow to Shakespeare's country, and shall have the opportunity of inspecting his birthplace, the noble church where he constantly worshipped, and the many relics connected with him which have been collected at Stratford-on-Avon. What a vista of intellectual enjoyment does all this unfold to our vision, and what a chance of becoming more intimately acquainted with places and objects of which perhaps hitherto we have had but an imperfect knowledge. I know that I am not addressing or speaking on behalf of ladies and gentlemen of the gapeseed order, who wander about on these occasions in an aimless manner, and concentrate the little attention they can focus on the subject to the most uninteresting objects which may come under their notice, as I am sure that all of us who take part in these congresses are actuated by a desire to gain instruction and improvement, and possibly, if the opportunity arises, to throw some light on matters which may have been imperfectly understood hitherto, and in the admirable programme provided for us we shall have every chance of studying many branches of mediæval archæology which have and will come under our notice.

Mr. Mayor, as I stated at the outset, my remarks must be brief, as I have not had the time, and I doubt if I have the power, to deliver an erudite address on the general subject of archæology, and I am not clear that such an address would be acceptable to my audience this evening; so I will conclude these somewhat disjointed remarks by expressing on behalf of the Society, of which during the ensuing year I am proud to be the President, the best thanks of its members to the

Mayor and Mayoress for their kind and courteous reception and welcome to this ancient borough, and to the several ladies and gentlemen who have combined to render our visit a specially pleasant and memorable one. It is still, and I trust always will be, a distinguishing characteristic of our English people to dispense hospitality when it is solicited, and to assist those who are actuated by rational motives to gratify their anxiety for greater knowledge. With such encouragement it is confidently hoped that congresses such as this may continue to be held to the mutual advantage of all who take part in them.