

LEICESTERSHIRE
ARCHITECTURAL AND ARCHÆOLOGICAL
SOCIETY.

December 5th, 1860.

IN accordance with the Resolution passed at the last Meeting of the Committee, a *Soirée* was held in the new Music Hall, Leicester, under the presidency of the Right Honorable Lord John Manners, M.P. The Hall was specially decorated, and upon long tables was arranged a fine collection of antiquities and works of art: the lower parts of the walls, too, were covered by architectural drawings, photographs, engravings, and paintings of local and general interest, above which was arranged a series of rubbings of Monumental Brasses, illustrative of the address to be delivered by Mr. Boutell later in the evening.

At seven o'clock the PRESIDENT took the chair, and said:

Ladies and gentlemen,

IF it were expected that your Chairman on this occasion should deliver some kind of inaugural address on the subject of Architecture, and Archæology, I confess that I should have resolutely declined to occupy this chair to-night; for, much as I admire those studies, and greatly as I think they are calculated to promote great public objects, I am free to confess that a life mainly spent in S. Stephen's is little adapted to qualify one to obtain a pleased and attentive audience upon an occasion of this kind. But, if you will be good enough to look at the programme, you will see that, were I disposed to glance at the particular objects of the Leicestershire Architectural and Archæological Society, I should be only poaching on the manor so ably occupied by Mr. Ordish. That being the case, I must ask, what is it your Chairman is expected to say in opening the proceedings of this evening? And, therefore, you will excuse me if I am exceedingly brief in making a few observa-

tions to fill up the time expressed in the programme between my taking the chair and the delivery of the first lecture—my office, I fear, being pretty much the same as that of the organ between the stated hour of Divine Service and its actual commencement. Therefore taking advantage of those few minutes, I may be permitted to make a few passing observations. We cannot but see the great and acknowledged improvement and the spread of architectural knowledge during the last two decades of our history: this I believe to result not from the operations and enquiries of societies such as that which has caused us to meet this evening, but I believe, on the contrary, that these Societies are but the product of a great and deep-seated improvement in architectural study and knowledge; and the conclusion I should form from this fact, if it be one, is that the position of those arts and those studies is a sound and a safe one—that it does not depend on a fictitious excitement, nor on any sudden opinion, but is the result of the deep-rooted conviction of intelligent and well-regulated minds. Another observation I should wish to make; it is that this development of archaeological and architectural knowledge owes nothing whatever to the government of the country—differing from architecture and art in most continental countries. I remember shortly after I entered parliament, that the late Mr. Joseph Hume—who never erred on the side of extravagance, or on the side of Government grants—coming to me with a bundle of documents he had received from France, publications of that department of the State that has the care of the restoration and supervision of ancient public monuments in that country—for the purpose of endeavouring to interest the Government of England to take a somewhat similar course, and devote a sum to the repair and maintenance of the beautiful and interesting monuments of antiquity on the point of crumbling to decay. Mr. Hume was then the foremost member, indeed the chairman of a society, which had for its object the throwing open of our cathedrals to the people; but even in those days Mr. Hume made but little effect upon most of the members of the House of Commons, or upon the Government. But what is the state of the case now? By private zeal, and an improved state of knowledge throughout the country at large, the people have to a great extent remedied the evils of which Mr. Hume was complaining. Every year the House of Commons grants any sum, almost without question, which the executive government may ask for the maintenance or restoration of the buildings confided to the charge of Government in England, or in Scotland: and, as we all know, the cathedrals of the land are now devoted to the public as well as religious purposes to which they were dedicated. I may say, that one of my most pleasing duties when I presided over that department, was to prepare and arrange the necessary votes for the repair, or restoration, or improvement of those beautiful and interesting monuments of

ancient art, which are confided to the charge of the Board of Works; and I am bound to say that I never found any difficulty in inducing the House of Commons to give the necessary attention to those national monuments, as Carisbrooke Castle, the Tower of London, S. Andrew's, Glasgow Cathedral, or the palace of Linlithgow and other buildings, in Scotland more especially, which are placed under the care of that particular department of the State. In this, as in so many other cases, the action of parliament and the government has followed, rather than led the improved taste and knowledge of the country. It occurs to me, however, that there is one memorable exception to this gratifying rule, and that is, in the firm determination which has been evinced by the head of the present Government, not to sanction that remarkable change in public taste in matters of architecture, which your presence here this evening at this Architectural and Archæological Meeting in my opinion, clearly establishes. Lord Palmerston may be a very great reformer in other departments of the State, but I think it clear in architecture at any rate, he is one of the sturdiest anti-reformers this generation can boast of. If Lord Palmerston's determination is successful, we shall see one of the greatest public buildings of the country erected in a manner which no doubt, our ancestors a hundred years ago would have admired, but from which the more educated taste and knowledge of the country at the present time is revolting, if it has not already revolted. I should be sorry to take upon myself to speak in your name or in the name of any Architectural or Archæological Society, but while I am upon this subject I would innocently express an earnest hope that the members of the different architectural societies will give an expression of their views, be it favourable in the matter I am now indicating, or be it unfavourable, and so decide what shall be the style of the great pile of buildings which will have to be erected in the course of a few months for the reception of the Indian and Foreign departments of the Government, and so that we may have the satisfaction of knowing what is the deliberate opinion of these architectural societies, and which may, I think, be properly looked upon as the cultivated architectural taste of the present generation. Although, ladies and gentlemen, I have said that I looked upon these societies as the products of the improved architectural and archæological taste and knowledge of the present day, I am of opinion that these societies have rendered, and will render, service in many ways. Among those modes I should say that by removing erroneous views—by spreading throughout the districts to which they respectively belong, careful and minute accounts of the peculiarities of the district,—these societies are doing an enormous amount of good. It is not only that the architecture of Scotland differs from the architecture of England—it is not only that the architecture of Scotland and of England differs widely from Ireland,

but I believe in almost every county a peculiarity of material or construction, or both, is found, by those who take the pains to investigate. I think therefore that these local societies by spreading the knowledge of these local peculiarities throughout their respective districts, and showing how this knowledge can be applied to a practical purpose is effecting an infinite good. In church restoration—instead of seeing a church restored according to some preconceived idea, without any knowledge of the peculiarity of the district—we are almost certain to see the restoration made with the most minute attention to those peculiar features which characterize the architecture of the time, and the district in which that church is placed. For an illustration of this, we need not go far from this room. I refer to the perfect and beautiful work of restoration of S. Mary's Church—which I had the pleasure of visiting a few days since, and where the most minute attention has been paid to every local feature that characterizes that important building. Such then being some of the views and objects of these societies, I rejoice that Leicester possesses one of them, supported in the satisfactory manner in which the Society is supported. I rejoice that the members of this Society thought fit to call a meeting on this occasion, and would remind them of the old Horatian maxim—

“*Segnus viritant animos demissa per aurem
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus—*”

and suggest they should act upon it; and I might trouble each gentleman to whisper into the ear of his fair neighbour a translation of that somewhat hackneyed phrase. At the bi-monthly meetings of the Society, I am informed there has been a considerable attendance and great interest manifested during the last two seasons, and at which models and objects of art are exhibited in the same way as they have been this evening. I hope, therefore, if there are any gentlemen present who have not attended those meetings they may be induced to do so for the future. I think it would be strange indeed in such a county as Leicester, and in a town like Leicester, that a society like the present should not be well supported, for I cannot conceive a county more curious or possessing more interesting remains for architectural or archæological study. Perhaps it would be going too far to say that in this very town we may find specimens of every style of architecture, from the days of its foundation by King Lear, through those days when Leicester paid a tribute of fifteen sextaries of honey to the Plantagenet kings, down to the present time, when we see such a grand development of the glories of red brick. But if that be an exaggeration, we may say that we have every style of acknowledged architecture which England can boast of. Ladies and gentlemen, I have taken the chair on the present occasion with much pleasure, but I am

afraid in this desultory manner I have occupied more of your time than I have been justified in doing. I have had the greatest possible pleasure in taking the chair, and I beg to express my full appreciation of the Society and its objects.

The noble Chairman then called upon the REV. CHARLES BOUTELL, M.A., to deliver his lecture on

MEDLÆVAL COSTUME AS ILLUSTRATED BY MONUMENTAL BRASSES.

THE speaker commenced by a reference to the subject of monumental remains in general, and brasses in particular. The metal of which they were composed was not, however, strictly brass, but a kind of bronze, and much harder. They first appeared in this country about the year 1200. The devices upon them were always engraved, and sometimes colour was employed, and so nearly approaching to enamel that it might with propriety be so called. The hardness of the metal, and the fact of the designs being engraved, made them very durable. The value of the designs of course depended on the ability of the artist who originally conceived them, and on the manipulative skill of the workman who carried out the design. For the most part they were good as works of art, more especially before the year 1430, the art of outline drawing being then thoroughly understood and appreciated. The designs were also invariably faithful in regard to costume and other accessories, not of the individual commemorated, but of the period when the work was executed. On knowing, therefore, the date of a brass, the most absolute reliance might be placed on its representations of costume, armour, &c. After the date named, monumental art in this country began to decline.

The study of these brasses had been of great advantage to art. Our historians and artists had made great mistakes in consequence of their ignorance of mediæval armour and costume; even Sir Walter Scott, in "Ivanhoe" had made very serious mistakes in consequence of this ignorance. It was not true, for example, that there was any authority for speaking of plumed helmets and other matters, which made a very pretty picture, but which were unfortunately not correct. The designs on the brasses for the most part represented not extravagant and eccentric, but the most ordinary fashions of their respective times, and hence their especial value as indicating costume with exactitude. The peculiar richness of this country in military brasses was adverted to, and the lecturer regretted that a national collection of them had never been formed at the public expense.

He proceeded to illustrate his remarks by reference to the