

PARISH REGISTERS AND RECORDS.

BY J. A. L. BEASLEY, Esq.

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I TRUST it will not be thought that the subject of Parish Records and Registers is scarcely congenial to an Archæological Society's Transactions. I find that at rare intervals in the past, transcripts in brief have been published, and papers on them read. The fabric of the church, rather than the contents of its chests, has engrossed attention; but are not both medieval, if not ancient records, and deserving of our notice?

Topography and Genealogy are closely allied, and Archæology is near akin.

The names of past owners and occupiers will be found associated with churches, residences, and even fields and woods. This is a most interesting study, and is promoted to greater or less extent by the Parish Registers and Records.

Dry as the pursuit of genealogy may seem to some—indeed I fear I must say to many—those who will make a practical acquaintance with it, and I speak after upwards of 16 years' experience, will find it very fascinating. Unlike other exciting hobbies, it is one from which the results cannot be ephemeral. Treasure will be hoarded up for others in future days; and a monument erected in the pages of family history, more durable than marble or brass; and posterity will be thankful.

Genealogical study has also this advantage, that it can be indulged in by persons of moderate means, or at least this is yearly being facilitated.

I fear there is a feeling abroad that the subject of pedigree research is rather a feminine pursuit, tinged with personal vanity; and that it leads some persons to despise those who have not the advantage of a good lineage. This is distinctly wrong and to be deprecated. If it comes to vaunted pride and prejudice, I think the escutcheon of few of us will be free from the baton sinister, long before we get to the seize quartiers!!

I wonder also if we have thought of this subject in the light of the fifth commandment? The genealogist is clearly following the precept of Holy Writ.

Let me therefore clear away all doubt; and let us all endeavour to turn the public mind into a useful channel, so far as may be necessary to secure the essential support. And let not antiquaries despise or deride this branch. I fear that in their inconsistency some are digging in the sands of Egypt to find the ancient catacombs; and then with laborious perseverance, deciphering the hieroglyphics; and what do they find? Ancient Registers, may I not say? Is it not probable that previous to the middle of the sixteenth century, when most registers commence, there were other records; at least as old as the churches? If so, what has become of them? I venture to say, that not a day passes but one leaf of a Parish Register is swept into obscurity. The notorious jam-pot cover incident—I will say tradition in the present company—a spot of incipient damp, the poor church mouse, or the fading ink, are causes of the daily sacrifice; apart from the wholesale destruction by fire and theft.

Is it not surprising that until the commencement of the Victorian era, there was but one Society and one Journal that dealt with antiquarian, topographical, and genealogical subjects; and the latter to a small extent only. Individual writers and historians, like John Nichol locally, added to the published information of pedigrees and other records, but the nation was I suppose too busy to be interested in our Parish Registers, and showed no anxiety either to find out what they contained, or to preserve them for future generations.

With the advance of peaceful times, the acquisition of wealth, and its greater security, came the opportunity for thought. Genealogy and pedigree work obtained a more prominent position, and were not to be despised. There was however the difficulty that the sources of information were inaccessible, except by the payment of certain fees, and the expense and trouble of long journeys—a great consideration before railways were available.

The use of these Registers was therefore confined mainly to the legal profession. There were comparatively few wealthy people who employed the expert, failing Herald's College, and made use of these Registers; and in addition the Historian, and a few seekers after wealth. That anyone should wish to search such dry matter for the love of the subject, and truth, as a noble President of this Society once described the aim of the sincere archæologist, was incredible. It is not so now.

As the nineteenth century progressed, archæological and kindred Societies, with their publications, increased in numbers. Apart from the transactions of what I might term the ancient Antiquarian Society, we find the "Retrospective Review" was founded in 1820;

this unfortunately for its contents and not for its title, ceased in 1854. Next came the "Ecclesiologist," its object aptly designated by its name; but this again only lasted till 1868—perhaps not a short period considering the youth of the new science.

Then came the foundation of the Royal Archæological Institute in 1844; the parent of the many County Societies which followed more or less rapidly,—including this Society in 1862, if I mistake not.

In briefly surveying the field of genealogical research, I must not omit to mention the "Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica," begun in 1866, and the well-known Harleian Society in 1869. "The Gentleman's Magazine," strange to say, was the only publication of its time to deal with genealogical subjects; and this after over a century of usefulness, was discontinued forty years ago.

The pedigree hunter and record searcher hailed therefore the founding of the British Record Society in 1888. What should we do without the Indexes, Records and Calendars, of this Society? What are we missing by the non-publishing of the other records in the Parish Church and Chest? I fear we are selfish and too parochial. May be we are so familiar with what our little world contains, that we count as so much waste paper, or rotten vellum, these documents—not so insignificant, but that numerous Acts of Parliament and penalties were concerned in their formation.

To continue the historical retrospect. What I have enumerated may be treated as National Societies and publications. I have mentioned the enthusiasm of the period, which as it spread, impelled the counties to the noble task of wresting from oblivion and decay the ancient work of man's hands. Before the year of the Great Exhibition, at least one county, viz., Somerset, and probably more, had formed Archæological Societies. And in the fifties and the sixties most of those now in existence were founded; so that there is scarcely a county without such a Society, called by one name or another.

I have not taken any note of official publications, or the work of individuals and expert writers, such as the Rev. Dr. W. Stukeley and Roger and Samuel Gale; the fathers of antiquarian research, even if genealogy was in its infancy. Nor have I noted the Manuscripts that abound in Libraries and private collections, which do not concern my present subject; nor the many works on Archæology and Topography, such as "Notes and Queries," which the nineteenth century produced. I might say in passing that I think it reflects on us that the interesting and useful local publication bearing that title has never been revived.

It may be wondered why I recite all these societies and publications, and if they be germane to the subject of Parish Registers. But my labours have been to find out what has been done in the way of printing, and thus making available the Registers and records; and since all the publications I have named deal to some extent with genealogy, and related matters, I include these; because I wish to take you from the beginning to the end, and show what little has been done, and how much there is to accomplish.

We now reach the period when the movement was strongest, and it will be more interesting, since it is within our memories. The wave of American and Colonial enquiry began to beat with greater force on our shores. Like the call from Macedonia of old, the message came, 'send over and help us.' This was responded to, but we have not supplied a tenth of what is wanted even now. This demand has however made it possible for the great work of printing Parish Registers and Records, to be undertaken; both in providing the necessary financial help, and in giving the opportunity for a noble band of workers. Among the latter we find the name of the late Mr. A. Gibbons, whose perseverance and capacity it is difficult to estimate. He issued "The Northern Genealogist"; but like so many individual efforts, his work died with him, and Lincolnshire perhaps was the greatest loser.

Then we have other books, and I am again only referring to continued publications (and not special volumes), such as "The Ancestor"; "The New England Register"; and "The Pedigree Register" of the year before last. These are noble efforts of isolated enthusiasts, but from lack of support many have come to grief. Unlike the Directories—such as the "National Biographical" and Mr. Bernau's "International Genealogical," they depend on yearly help for an indefinite period.

I must refer in passing to the printed Calendar of Wills, Visitations, and County Pedigrees, amongst which is the work of our talented townsman, Mr. H. Hartopp. What a pity we have not more of such workers!

In my historical survey, I have reached the year 1896. What do we find has been done for the Parish Registers and Records? With two exceptions, nothing! That is, in the way of preserving them, by printing, from destruction. Of the two enterprises that of the Thoresby Society may be set aside, since only three volumes have been issued; the other is the Harleian Society, responsible for the London Registers, which commenced in 1880.

For some years the eyes of the genealogist and antiquary had

been directed on the preserves of the Clergy ; and the imagination was fired by the thought of the contents of Parish Chests. But it was not till the year 1896 that sufficient support was obtained to form a systematic organisation for the publication of the Parish Registers, as a series of National Records.

This took shape in the founding of the Parish Register Society, which is now termed the parent Society. Will it be believed that throughout the country fewer than 200 subscribers of one guinea were found? Leicestershire assisted to the extent of three members ; being so few I think I might mention the names—your worthy Honorary Secretary, Major Freer ; that old supporter and valued contributor, Colonel Bellairs, and myself.

This parent Society had the whole of the country before it, and it was almost beyond hope of completing the task in a reasonable time. It was felt that if a start were made, others would be encouraged to follow suit ; and the counties might form themselves into local societies to restrict the area to be dealt with. This proved to be correct, for in the following year, the Shropshire Society, the most vigorous of all, was formed ; in 1898 the Durham and Northumberland, and the Lancashire Societies ; in 1899 the Yorkshire ; the Staffordshire Society in 1901 ; Buckinghamshire followed in 1902 ; and Surrey in the following year. For five years there have been no new societies, but I hope it may shortly be announced to the world—and I can tell you it is being looked forward to with much encouragement from the letters I have already received—that Leicestershire will make the ninth !

These Societies have printed about 250 Parish Registers ; most of them are complete from the earliest entry to 1812, but not all. They include Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, besides longer or shorter Parish Histories ; in some cases a record of all monuments and tablets in the church, and I find even the principal tombstone descriptions and epitaphs in the churchyard. This is, I fear, going too far, and a too ambitious scheme might cripple the work in its inception. However, much depends on the size of the parish. If it can include additional matter in brief, my opinion is that the Register becomes a much better book for the general public. Part of the dryness is taken from it, and the inhabitants will appreciate such a Register as a work of reference, and as a history of the church and parish in which they live.

It may be argued that one has only to obtain a Kelly's Directory to find this matter ; but apart from the bulk of a Directory, think of the conglomeration of matter ; the stereotyped and guide-book descriptions ; the advertisements, and the commercial aspect of the

whole affair. I think I need not say anything further against these useful and necessary modern cyclopædias.

Let us see what Leicestershire has done towards making manuscript records of its Registers. A few have been printed in part, but I cannot find that a single Register has been printed *in toto*.

I find from the latest available information that this county is one of the four lowest in England, that has copied transcripts either in part, or as a whole. Lincolnshire can boast of close upon 300; Sussex upwards of 250; and seven other counties over 100 each. Leicestershire has the magnificent sum total of 15!

I calculate that this County has about 250 distinct Registers, which should be printed in 25 years at the most; and the wish is father to the thought that it might be earlier.

Now let us return to Mr. Phillimore's work. No one appreciates it more than I, but on the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread. This series has been carried on with a considerable measure of success in Cornwall, Nottinghamshire, Gloucestershire and other counties. About 100 volumes have been printed, but like the parent Parish Register Society, Mr. Phillimore has the whole of England before him; and Scotland and Ireland in the background. He cannot possibly live to complete his task, unless other Societies help him. We should be forwarding his useful work, if we could form a local Society, and I have little doubt of the feasibility of this provided we all make an effort.

Again, look at the waste of energy, and disappointment in dealing with Marriages only! Anyone acquainted with Parish Registers, knows that the entries are very confused at times. The transcriber is required to spend considerable time in collating. No mark whatever must be made in the Register and so no guide is left behind. In fifty years' time or so, when Mr. Phillimore or his successor (and unfortunately as I have pointed out, these individual efforts die with the founder), reaches the Baptisms, this work will have to be again gone through. Moreover Mr. Phillimore confines himself too strictly to the registrations. He scarcely takes any note of other entries; and his editorial is of a dry nature, dealing with the size of registers, and general condition. Hence it has little interest but to the pedigree searcher. If this course is followed, as it obviously will be with the Baptisms and Burials, then we shall have no account of the other interesting records in the parish archives. They will be so few in individual cases that it will not be considered worth while dealing with them as a separate publication.

Let us therefore see what we find in this way. I do not say that Leicestershire parishes contain all the records I shall mention; indeed we are in the dark until a search is made, but I have extracted my information from parishes in England, which do contain such entries.

Apart from the Registers themselves we find the following:—

- (1) Vestry Books with the Rolls of the Churchwardens and Overseers.
- (2) Charity and other Documents.
- (3) Bonds, Orders and Briefs.
- (4) Certificates of Settlement.
- (5) Orders of Removal.
- (6) Indentures of Apprenticeship.
- (7) Constables Warrants.
- (8) Magisterial Examinations.
- (9) Marriage Licenses, Certificates and Letters.
- (10) Faculties, Plans, Specifications and Contracts.
- (11) Bills and Receipts.
- (12) Terriers and Inventories.
- (13) Acts of Parliament and Orders.
- (14) Forms of Prayer and Thanksgiving.

There may be even other papers. Few people know anything about these documents. Possibly they become so familiar to the clergy that some are treated as waste paper. How is one to discriminate? That large numbers of these things have vanished, admits of no contradiction. Ought this to be so? What we think of little moment to-day, may be of the greatest interest in years to come. Everything relating to the Parish Church and its people is useful.

I must not detain you by going through the List of Documents seriatim, but I will deal with them in a discursive manner.

I believe it is often forgotten that formerly people were less migratory than now; and many families were permanently located in a restricted area. Hence the cause for the Certificates of Settlement, and Orders for Removal.

I will give you an instance of the value of these. A few years ago there was found when transcribing the Parish Registers of Moulton, the entry of William Carey (1785). He was known in later life as the 'Inspired Cobbler.' From a humble beginning

he became the Evangelist of India ; Professor of Sanscrit in the College of Fort William ; and indeed I might say the Father of modern Missions.

To some this discovery alone would be considered well worth the twelve years' indefatigable labours of that wonderful and painstaking transcriber, Mr. Sidney J. Madge.

The Vestry Books, particularly the early ones—contrary perhaps to general expectation—contain information of a useful kind to the genealogist and historian of the Parish.

Then there are the well-known 'Briefs.' Almost every Parish has these. What incidents and calamities they commemorate ! And how many people are aware of these outside a charmed circle, or know these 'Calls' to be equivalent to the modern Mansion House Fund ?

Further, how much we gather from them as to the purchasing power of money, and the scarcity of the precious metal.

The Indentures of Apprenticeship give us much insight into the social life of the times. For instance, we read that one John Clifton was put out to apprentice for the customary period of seven years "to learn the art, trade or mystery of a Tailor." The legal phraseology of the present day follows, but what struck me as a little peculiar, although it may not be so to the legal fraternity present, was this, "And at the end of the term to give him one new suit of clothes for Sundays ; one good suit for working days ; 5 good shirts ; 5 pairs of stockings ; 2 sheets ; 2 pairs of shoes ; and 2 neck-handkerchiefs." Since he was apprenticed by the Churchwardens, this was a case of orphanage, and it shows one of the advantages of those days ; at least to the apprentice.

When one reads through the London records, even stranger clauses can be found ; such as the provision—which must seem extraordinary to most people of the present day—that "salmon shall not be given more than once a week."

The Marriage Licenses, where such exist in the Parish, are of course invaluable to the genealogist. I fear however these are rare.

The Terriers also are scarce ; but such as are extant record the former demesne of the Parsonage with its appurtenances ; the old enclosures and commonages ; and we find in them that curious word 'free-board,' with its oft disputed meaning.

The "Faculties" speak for themselves ; and a brief note thereon could easily be made in a printed Register. It would give the date

of any erection or addition to the Church ; and at the same time give interesting data as to the evolution of the fabric or the form of worship.

The Acts of Parliament, and the Forms of Prayer, although more modern, will have points of interest well worth recording.

Now let us look at the Registers themselves, and see what useful information we can find. I wish to leave the genealogist alone for the moment. From the large number of deaths in a year, assisted perhaps by marginal notes, we find the dates of plagues and other epidemics. There is evidence that these were never totally absent from the country before 1666. It will be an exception to find any old Register without any reference to them. The worst years were 1594, 1602, 1637 to 1643, 1658 (in which year Cromwell died of malaria), 1665, and 1683-5; and in the eighteenth century, 1715 and 1727-30.

In Morden register is the entry "Mistress Burdett nurse-keeper was buried Sept. 22nd 1652." Nurse-keeper is frequent, and was the old form for 'Nurse.'

The great plague of 1665 is naturally the most often mentioned, although the old Chroniclers tell us that of 1348-9 was much worse. How interesting it would be if we could trace parish registers as far back! What a bitter disappointment to the genealogist when he has worked his way to the middle of the sixteenth century, to find his table must be left unfinished, so far as parish registers go. He feels that at least he might be permitted to reach the Conquest. Do we realise this is only twenty-five generations? And four and five generations are I believe sometimes living at one time.

We have learnt much from the study of the past in various walks of life. Who can say if a search in the parish registers for these medieval plagues and epidemics, particularly the latter of malarial designation, would not disclose to the medical faculty the origin and cure? We have stamped out plague, and why not influenza? The latter is probably indicated in an entry in the diary, about 200 years ago, of one Thomas Hearne, who then described the prevailing cause of death as "a feaverett, it being a small fever. It seizes suddenly and holds generally but three days."

That awful scourge small-pox, which followed the plague, can be traced throughout its life's history. I could give many entries showing the horror in which it was held, and the inhumanity brought about in consequence. This disease again has been practically wiped out.

The disposal of the Dissenter would cause alarm in the present day, for we have an entry at Misterton in 1715, "William Walton a dessenter was Laid into ye ground the xxiv day of Sept. without any burial." And a further entry in the same Parish shows how our forefathers adopted another plan than our costly system of dealing with lunatics. In 1727 "Samuel Turle of Showel being Lunatick was drownded and laid in ye ground June xx." I am aware that this is capable of a double meaning.

Then we have the witty entry of "Pretious Stone borne at Wavedon the 26th Sept. and baptized ye fyfthe of Oct. 1601. This was a child of the parson's and is the second instance of his 'pretty wit.'" This must have been the entry of an impudent clerk; and so it informs us by whom the Registers were kept, and what value to place on the caligraphy and orthography.

Of great interest to some will be the Latin insertions to baptisms, as *sine cruce*; Marriages, *absque annulo*; and Burials, *cum concione* or *apud suggestum*. Why for instance certain deceased persons should have had a funeral sermon—irrespective apparently of rank—is not always clear.

Perhaps to the general reader the notes as to the weather, the progress of the harvest, and the early or late arrival of spring, will be the means of interesting them in the Parish Registers. This may lead on to greater things; and awaken even a genealogical ambition.

I must not however make any further quotations, but finish this part of my Paper by a brief reference to the general history of the registers themselves.

The Vicar-General, Thomas Cromwell, after the dissolution of the religious houses, issued the first Order for the keeping of parish registers in Sept. 1538. Fresh injunctions followed in Edward VI.'s reign, and notably in Queen Elizabeth's; indeed many registers make 1558 a landmark. In 1597 an Order was issued in this Queen's reign for the paper copies to be transcribed on to parchment; and we know how badly this work was done in many cases, so much so that none of these transcripts can be taken as absolutely correct, and all ought to be compared with the original paper copy if in existence.

Bishops' transcripts were ordered to be made; and that Order has never been rescinded, so that all clergy are now in default.

In the confusion of Charles I.'s time, and during the Commonwealth, these Orders were generally disregarded. Nevertheless we find 'Births' registered as well as Baptisms. Parliament also instituted civil marriages in 1654; and these are some of the

longest entries in the Registers, and give much useful information to the genealogist; although to my mind adding an unnecessary and extravagant cost in the printing *verbatim*.

Burials 'in Woollen' were compulsory from 1667 till 1814, when the Act was repealed. There were however transgressors, for I find burials in 'Linnen' in 1788.

With the Restoration, Parliament re-imposed the former Orders; and under William III. it was found necessary to create a penalty for neglect. This brought about a better state of things, but clergymen in Queen Anne's reign so commonly pleaded ignorance of the law, that they were freed from fine by an Act of Indemnity.

In 1711 Registers with ruled and numbered pages were provided, from which time the transcriber's task is lightened.

By 1753 it was found that Registers were sometimes tampered with, and Lord Hardwick's Marriage Act made this a felony in the following year, and again added materially to the length of Marriage entries.

Rose's Act was the next, and this came into force with 1813; future registrations were on printed forms provided by the King's printers. And to close the history, in 1836 the Registration Act was passed, and the future value of parish registers much diminished. This Act established, as we all know, the Registrar-General and his department at Somerset House.

I have now given a chronological résumé of the whole matter. I have stated what has been done; and I think suggested what remains to be done.

If any doubt still lingers as to the necessity for printing parish registers at all, I will finally dispose of this, by referring the erring one to the Reports of the Committee for promoting the transcription and publication of parish registers; published under the direction of the Congress of Archæological Societies, in union with the Society of Antiquaries. The one I have had before me is dated 1896; this synchronises with the foundation of the parent Parish Record Society.

It would seem to me that these reports might have much weight with members of this Society, since they are the fruit of a Congress, at which I suppose this Society would be represented, although I have not looked the point up.

To apply the knowledge so far gained locally, can we say Leicestershire is any exception to the rule? Have the registers

been well written? And are they all complete, and in good preservation?

I fear not, and that we need the printing press as much as any County. Where are the registers of Knaptoft, Elmesthorpe, and Ratby, for instance? Many years thereof are missing. How was the British Museum enabled to purchase from a private individual, a layman, the parish register of Somerby (1601-1715)? And again the Bodleian Library to acquire in a similar way the register of Shackerstone (1558-1630)?

I sincerely trust things are different from what they were years ago, when it is recorded that a Vicar's wife flung a register into the fire, in the heat of a domestic tantrum; and another parish priest being unable to read an early Anglo-German entry, cut out the page, and sent it to the enquirer himself, in order not to lose the fee. This shall not be said of the Clergy of the present day; but I do wonder if the Vicar's favourite dog or cat gained access to the parish records, and there deposited a litter of pedigree stock—whether the genealogy of the man or the animal would be thought most of? I specially refer to this weakness, since amongst the curious stories I read of—not legendary but from a Report of the House of Commons Committee which sat in 1835—is that of a sporting parson, whose spaniel was known to have made a layer in the Parish Chest, and the vellum being so disfigured thereby, it was cut into labels for the game which he sent to his friends!!

Though more enjoyable than the dry matter which I fear my Paper mostly contains, I must refrain from further divagations of this kind.

I will return to the object I have in view, viz., the urgent need for the formation of a local Parish Register Society.

One thing is certain, the success of such will rest primarily with the clergy. It is on this account amongst others that my appeal is made to this Society, so eminently representative of the clergy. Its organisation is particularly fitted to found a Leicestershire Society—and might I suggest our sister county so much associated with us—viz., Rutland, be asked to join?

Will therefore the clergy give the proposal their hearty and unanimous support? Perhaps before this is answered I should deal with what I think is the only remaining aspect of this subject, viz., What will the clergy lose in fees? My reply to this, which I give you advisedly after learning by the experience of others, is Nothing! I do not say that individual cases would not arise, but

taken over the county, the gains will be greater by far than the losses; and I will tabulate my reasons:—

- (1) What are the average fees now obtained, for registrations *previous to 1812*? I take this year since this is as far as the printing would go under any circumstances. I have seen it stated the fees do not average 1s. per annum throughout the country. This is however obviously a pure guess, but the clergy themselves will each be able to say. I can however quote from a letter written by the Rev. George E. Park, of Burton Fleming, in 1899, in which he says, “during twenty years I have only been asked twice to search for 200 years back. I hope all Incumbents,” he adds, “will readily allow their Registers to be printed, and so be the means of preserving those priceless records.”

At rare intervals an advertisement appears in the papers of £5 or £10 reward for an entry, but the search is so indefinite and speculative, as not to be worth the collective labour of those who attempt to obtain the reward.

- (2) The printed registers will not be ‘Evidence’; this I think is well known. Hence each entry will require to be certified by the clergy, for the usual purposes the same are now applied for.

Look however at the discoveries that will be made by the amateur and professional genealogist, in the new location of families and names? Surely this must lead to the necessity for entries in much larger number subsequent to 1812. Indeed every new pedigree searcher, and I suppose the number of such is increasing, if slowly, day by day, must commence his labours after 1812; and if he has evidence, not before possessed, that his family come from a certain parish, as disclosed by the printed register, is it not likely that register will be wanted much more? The fees must increase.

- (3) Again, it is argued, that with the registers printed, there will not be any need to apply to the Clergy.

How absurd this is. How many copies of these local publications do we find it is usual to print? Not more than 150 on the average; and I should be well pleased if Leicestershire could get this number. In some cases it is only 100. What will these be, when scattered over the world? Like a grain of sand in the desert. There will be many who will never hear of them.

(4) What do the clergy gain in addition ?

A printed register clearly transcribed, and handy for reference, from which extracts can easily be made; that is to say each Incumbent will be presented with a copy of the printed register, free.

In this way if my plan be carried out, there would be in addition a complete inventory of all Church documents. I believe I should not be wrong in stating that new Incumbents have sometimes been asked to take charge of papers in boxes or tied up in bundles without being able to ascertain if any are missing or defective.

Do the clergy also realise what further assistance this printed register will be? I think I rightly interpret the Act of Parliament, by which the legal charges are made—I am open to correction if I do not—when I state the Incumbent must do the searching and write the certificates. The Act presupposes his ability to do so. Hence, if the early entries cannot be read, *no fee can be legally charged*.

To show the enthusiasm of some of the clergy, I might mention that the Rector of Rylstone, in Yorkshire, the Rev. C. H. Lowe, undertook the transcribing and printing of his registers, at the considerable cost of £66. This was in 1895, and since then the greater part of the outlay has been repaid by the sales. Individual cases like this are not however to be commended.

(5) Might I not add that the printed register would be a capital source of information and 'copy' for the Parish Magazine? This is often made use of to-day; but all the Clergy do not relish the straining of eyes and intellect, in examining the manuscripts themselves. It would be distinctly different with the handy volume to refer to.

The parishioners would obtain an insight of the old English social life; gain an idea of the ups and downs of the parish; material for the better determining of the meaning of surnames and place-names; and historical data, which might be the means of shaking off the apathy that so frequently exists in rural, if not urban populations.

I think therefore I have proved that the gains will be much greater than the losses. But one thought more:—

Are these records of the past—the only ones we have of nine-tenths of the population—to remain outside the reach of the people who have built them up? Books of Law and Medicine require interpreting by the respective faculties;

but these simple annals of the poor—I am considering the nine-tenths—need no interpretation, but what the voluntary transcriber is willing to give. Hence is it fair that such should be withheld from sight? These registers are national Records, belonging to the State Church, and as members of a community, should be reasonably open to all. Moreover such Records demand security, and not the existence of only one copy.

If the clergy of Leicestershire would like to know how the Parish Society movement is being received in other Counties, I can on a future occasion read some interesting extracts from letters I have received. I can only find one instance in the eight Societies, where a Vicar declined to have his registers printed. There is not the least difficulty in obtaining offers of registers for transcription; and not much in finding transcribers; the real trouble is the lack of sufficient funds to print more quickly. Hundreds of registers are only waiting for the printer. In some cases the clergy themselves transcribe, with or without assistance, *i.e.*, when they are able.

Again, I find, seldom does any payment have to be made for anything except the printing. The editing and often the indexing is free.

Luckily for some counties there exists a determined band of workers—small I regret to say, but whose zeal and enthusiasm, combined with a dogged pertinacity, have overcome the initial difficulties. We have the privilege of gaining by this experience.

I have stated that Mr. Phillimore is afraid he will have to withdraw his series for this county. If he has failed, and this Society likewise, in obtaining the desired assistance for him, how much better off will a Parish Register Society fare?

The difference is this. We are on the spot, interested not financially (only in so far that the business must pay its way) but for the love of the subject. We should act collectively, with the prestige obtained from a good list of Patrons, President, Council or Committee, and the other usual officers; and possibly the added interest of an annual meeting of subscribers—and I might say honorary and subscribing, the former being the clergy.

The most important advantage to us will be the saving in expense in the printing, corrections of proof, etc. I have obtained estimates of this, and I consider we could print at least five complete small registers of say 50 pages per annum for a minimum of fifty one-guinea subscribers. I might venture to say I could at once put down thirty names if another fifty are forthcoming.

Therefore, let this Society take the matter up at once, and with every encouragement to which I have referred in this Paper. I am willing by all means in my power to help, either in the transcribing or editing, or secretarial work, although being a busy man my time for transcribing is limited. I have however made friends amongst that band of enthusiasts, and I know where to go for help. Surely, however, we shall find that this county is not lacking in the ability and willingness to assist in this labour of love. It cannot satisfactorily be done single-handed; and this is the Society to take the matter up, by forming a sub-committee to deal with it.

Shropshire has already completed half the county, and within the comparatively brief period of twenty years will have finished its work. This should be an encouragement.

I cannot do better than close this Paper by quoting an exhortation of that revered gentleman and true archæologist, the Rev. Ernest Tower, long since passed away, but whose memory has not been forgotten by some of us. In an address to this Society in 1872 he declared :

“It is the bounden duty of every one who cares for the local history of his county to attach himself to the study of the archæology of his parish, and especially to those objects of past interest which ought to be preserved, and carefully handed down to our children’s children.”

And then in his peroration he concluded :—“Let everyone therefore be encouraged to devote a little time to this study of archæology, and then there will be restored to local history a wholesome interest it now lacks—the benefit of which will be seen in an universal care of the time-honoured monuments—whether of *Families* (I would have you note) or old churches, throughout our native land.”
