

When they had listened to further glees and solos the company adjourned to the Library for refreshment. Afterwards, the first item on the programme related to the

PARENTAGE OF CARDINAL WOLSEY.

Upon this subject Mr. Vincent B. Redstone read a paper, in which he summarised the results of careful research amongst the Borough Records. The late Bishop of London, he said, commenced his "Life of Wolsey" with the following remarks:—"Thomas Wolsey was born at Ipswich, probably in March, 1471. He was the son of Robert Wolsey, and Joan, his wife. Contemporary slander, wishing to make his fortunes more remarkable, or his presumption more intolerable, represented his father as a man of mean estate, a butcher by trade. However, Robert Wolsey's will (1496) shows that he was a man of good position, probably a grazier and wool merchant, with relatives who were well to do."* As an instance of the "contemporary slander" here referred to, Mr. Redstone quoted the following lines from the bitter attack made upon Wolsey by the Poet Laureate, Skelton:—

† "Howbeit the primordiyall
Of his wretched original,
And his base progeny,
And his greasy genealogy.
He came of the sank royal
That was cast out of a butcher's stall."

Skelton was an East Anglian, probably allied to an Ipswich family of that name, and must have known Wolsey well. The two were at Oxford at the same time, and it further happened that while Skelton was Rector of Diss, Wolsey, then only a Chaplain, and holding the degree of B.A., was appointed to the benefice of Redgrave, a neighbouring parish, 1506. Under these circumstances the Poet would be well acquainted with the Cardinal's parentage. A serious slander had been cast upon the character of Wolsey, it was added, by writers who asserted that the missing records of the Borough of Ipswich were destroyed at his instigation, in order that all traces of his father's humble occupation might be obliterated. Such was not the fact. The "lost" records existed in the British Museum Library, the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and in private hands. Mr. Redstone explained how it was that he came to search amongst the archives at the Town Hall, and gave some very curious particulars about the Wolseys:—

"The Cardinal's family was not the only Wolsey family then residing in Ipswich. The late Mr. Cordy Jeafferson, whose services rendered to Ipswich historians are great, mentions a market scavenger,

* Chap. II., p. 18.

† "Why came ye not to Court?" l. 294.

Elizabeth Wolsey, widow, as receiving wages in the year 1588. In this year she died, and was buried in the churchyard of St. Mary Key.* Her husband's name was John Wolsey, but he could not have been the John Wolsey, of Ipswich, who in 1472 'attained an action of debt of £6 before the bailiffs of Ipswich against Thomas Wode, chaplain' (Chancery Proceedings Record Office.) † Was the latter John Wolsey brother to Robert Wolsey? We thus see that other Woleseys existed at the time within the borough, but, save for the entry just mentioned, no record has appeared connecting them with the town life.

"The question now arises—Was the Cardinal's father a Burgess of the town? I think so, for upon the first page of the General Courts Book of 2 Henry VII. (1489) his name appears in the list of twenty-six Burgesses, who were taxed to the sum of twelvecence each, to provide *valetts* or varlets fully equipped to servè the King on horseback, under the Earl of Oxford, wearing the Royal badge. The presence of his name amongst such as Falstolf, Timperley, Cady' (at the time Thomas Wolsey was at Oxford) shows that the father was then in fairly good circumstances."

Upon the question of the exact place of the Cardinal's birth, light was thrown in the following paragraph:—

"An enrolment made in 1478 records the purchase of a house in the parish of St. Nicholas by Robert Wolsey, on 15th October, 1473. For the tenement, garden, and use of half the well, Wolsey paid the small sum of £8 6s. 8d. This was a greater price than the previous owner, John Creyk (who died when holding the office of bailiff) must have placed upon it, for in his will, dated 1st March, 1471, ‡ the same month and year in which the Cardinal is said to have been born, Creyk desired his executors to sell this house and one in St. Lawrence parish in the best market, hoping to realise the sum of £10. Thomas Wolsey was not born in this house, but, as we shall see from the Lete Rolls, he was born in the parish of St. Mary Elms."

It was in the "Petty and General Courts Books" that Mr. Redstone discovered the more curious particulars about the Cardinal's father. In these Courts, before the bailiffs, such civil actions were heard as those which now come before the County Courts, and Robert Wolsey seems to have been so fond of litigation that he was always figuring therein. One entry shows that he was, together with John Peli, churchwarden of St. Nicholas in the year 1492, and that he entered an action against John Jurden, the chaplain of the church, in order to recover possession of a silver chalice. The paper concluded:—

"The records of the Lete Court, which tried all offences committed against the ordinances of the borough, give us the information we are in search of, viz., the calling or trade of Robert Wolsey. Here is an

* Parish Register. † Bundle 33, No. 151. ‡ Ipswich Probate Office, Book II.

instance of a benefit arising from an infringement of the bye-laws. The townsfolk accumulated the litter before their doors, and when the heaps were large enough made a bon-fire.* Bon-fires were especially frequent on the Eve of St. John the Baptist's Day, and were known in Suffolk as *nid* (i.e., rubbish) fires. The bailiffs sought to stop the custom, but Robert Wolsey would have his fire before his house on Colhyll, though he paid a fine for his enjoyment (1490). Colhyll occupied the site now known as Silent Street. Another sanitary arrangement was objected to by Robert Wolsey. His pigs required feeding, and where was there food more abundant than among the borough rubbish heaps? Wolsey insisted on allowing his pigs to seek their own living, wandering about the streets. The fine of threepence which was inflicted upon him for so doing would easily cover the expenses of their keep.

"The Lete Courts sat in the various Wards—North, South, East, and West. The first appearance of Wolsey in this Court (of which we have the record) was made in the year 1464. He was then dwelling in the S. Ward, or St. Nicholas Parish, and was summoned for selling victuals in his 'Hospicium' (? tavern) contrary to the Assize of the town, and also for permitting his cart to remain as an obstruction in the street. Two years afterwards we find he had moved his residence, appearing before the Lete Court of the West Ward, i.e., of St. Mary Elms, and he constantly renewed acquaintance with this Court until he purchased the house in St. Nicholas (1473), and removed once more to the South Ward. His dwelling is always called a 'Hospicium,' and as I find mention of 'le White Horse' as an 'Hospicium,' I am inclined to think that he was a tavern-keeper, following at the same time the avocation of a butcher, for he is frequently mentioned as selling bread, hay, oats, and other horse-meat, as well as offering in the market meat deemed to be unfit for food. He did not, according to the market regulations, exhibit the skins of the beasts he had killed, nor did he provide the Burgesses with a bull-baiting spectacle when he had an ox to slaughter, in accordance with the regulations. He sold diverse kinds of goods when residing in both Wards, but there is only one entry which has come to my notice in which he appears to have been known by his contemporaries as a 'butcher.'

"From these statements it is manifest that the Cardinal's father was in *bourgeois* circumstances, that the shin-bone which Thomas Wolsey adopted as a crest marks the fact that he was not ashamed of his origin, and that it was the social position of his mother's relatives which gave him his start in life."

In the course of his paper, Mr. Redstone recognised the value of the researches undertaken by Mr. H. C. Casley upon the same subject, and at the close of it he publicly thanked the Town Clerk and his assistants for their kindness in giving him every opportunity of looking

* Cely Papers, p. 113.

over the town records. He added that he had one very pleasing statement to make. Some of the borough documents, as he had told them, were dispersed in years gone by, and fell into private hands. Amongst the purchasers was Mr. Prigg, a former Secretary of the Institute, and, he was happy to say, that the daughter of that gentleman—Mrs. Andrews, of Higham, who was present—had asked him to present these documents * that had been in her possession to the Mayor of Ipswich, in order that they might be in future preserved amongst the archives of the Borough.

Mr. Redstone then handed the borough manuscripts to his Worship the Mayor, who thanked Mrs. Andrews most heartily for her gift to the town.

The town records, from which Mr. Redstone obtained the materials for his paper, were laid on the table for inspection.

Lord John Hervey, in moving a vote of thanks to the Mayor, who was probably more occupied, he said, in making history than in reading or writing it, took occasion to quote an extract from the "Book of Ely," which showed that the communal history of Ipswich, as a place of "great freedom and dignity," went back for a period of quite one thousand years.

The Mayor briefly acknowledged a vote which was passed with enthusiasm; Mr. H. C. Casley, who showed that the charges brought against Wolsey's father were for the most part in respect of venial offences, thanked the Chairman for presiding, and also the readers of the papers, and a like compliment to the Quartette party brought the *Conversazione* to a close.

The Exhibits in the Library comprised contributions by—

Rev. Dr. Raven—Original pass granted to a soldier by Sir J. Palmer, 1545. †

Mr. H. Hancox—Silver coins from old Ipswich mints and other specimens of bronze and flint implements.

Miss Nina F. Layard—Horn picks, Palæolithic and Neolithic implements, etc., lately found in Ipswich and neighbourhood. Human skull from the peat of the Orwell.

Mr. T. Parkington, jun.—Mediæval pottery and glass, recently found in the Butter Market, Ipswich. Six paintings of Ipswich views by local artists—Todd, Frost, Fred. Russell, and H. Gaye.

Woodbridge Field Club—Objects found on the site of the Romano-British Camp, Castle Field, Burgh, 1900-1901.

* Great Court Book 23-34, Henry VIII.

† *Proceedings of Institute*, Vol. x., pt. 3, p. 394.