

**ORIGINAL LETTERS, AND OTHER
DOCUMENTS, RELATING TO THE
BENEFACTIONS OF WILLIAM LAUD:
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, TO
THE COUNTY OF BERKS**

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Original Letters, and Other Documents, Relating to the Benefactions of William Laud:
Archbishop of Canterbury, to the County of Berks by John Bruce

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JOHN BRUCE

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ORIGINAL LETTERS, &c.
RELATING TO THE
BENEFACIONS OF ARCHBISHOP LAUD
TO THE COUNTY OF BERKS.

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AND OTHER DOCUMENTS,
RELATING TO THE
BENEFACTIONS OF WILLIAM LAUD,
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY,
TO THE
COUNTY OF BERKS.

EDITED BY JOHN BRUCE, ESQ. F.S.A.



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OF THE
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INTRODUCTION.

It falls within the province of the local historian to commemorate the actions of celebrated persons born within the limits he desires to illustrate, and his obligation to do so is the more certain in the instance of an individual who has maintained in after-life a connection with the place of his nativity, whether as possessing property, exercising influence, or devoting his wealth to advance its prosperity. A consideration of this obligation induced the Council of the Berkshire Ashmolean Society to determine upon printing the documents which are contained in the following pages. Archbishop Laud, from whom most of them proceeded, was a native of the chief town in that county to which the attention of the Society is to be directed, and the documents themselves principally relate to acts of charity and munificence on the part of the Archbishop, which yearly revive throughout the county of Berks the memory of his anxiety for its welfare. It is indeed only as a benevolent and charitable native of Berkshire, that, in this Society, we have anything to do with Archbishop Laud. The merits or faults of his

political conduct constitute a most important subject of consideration, but it is one upon which I am sure it would not be agreeable to the Council that I should enter. They would have the Archbishop set before the members of the Society, not as the advocate of political principles respecting which men will differ to the end of time, but as a man of kindly feelings and sympathies, labouring to better the condition of his poorer fellow-subjects, and especially of those connected with him by the tie of a common birth-place.

It weighed also with the Council in directing this publication, that it will tend to correct the erroneous notions which are prevalent respecting the nature of Archbishop Laud's Berkshire charities. In one author we read, that "in his native town of Reading he founded an excellent school;" in another, that "he founded an hospital in Reading;" in a third, that "he erected and endowed an almshouse in Reading;" and these representations, which are the mistakes of writers of character and authority,—the main props of English biography,—have been repeated, or have been but partially corrected by later inquirers. In the following pages an endeavour is made not only to give the history, but to explain both the nature and the extent of the Archbishop's munificence exercised towards his native county. In the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature* (ii. 205),

there is an interesting paper, written by Archdeacon Todd, upon the services rendered to general literature by Archbishop Laud; in the following pages we have an illustration of his liberality flowing in another direction; and, with respect to both, we may adopt the language of the Archdeacon, and assert, that his "bounty was more like that of a King than of a subject." "In bestowing," as was said of an Archbishop with whom Laud has been compared, "he was most princely."

As a further illustration of the character of this celebrated man, I have added, in the Appendix, a transcript of his will, which has hitherto been known only through the abridgment published by Wharton in the first volume of the Archbishop's Remains, p. 454. Wharton had principally in view the Archbishop's public character, which before his time had been treated with great injustice.* He consequently omitted many passages of the will which relate more particularly to the Archbishop's private affairs; but, at the present day, and with reference

* It is gratifying to know that Wharton's work was duly appreciated at Reading. In the Corporation Diary, under the date of 19th September, 1695, occurs the following entry: "It is alsoe agreed, that a small deske be fixed to the wainseott on the left hand side of the chimney in the counsell chamber, and that the booke (lately bought by the company, and this day brought thither by Mr. John Blake,) intituled, The History of the Troubles and Tryall of the most Reverend Father in God William Laud, late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, deceased, be chained to the said deske with a small brasse chaine."