

**THE PRETENDED
DISCOVERY OF A
ROMAN BATH AT BATH**

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The pretended discovery of a Roman bath at Bath by E. Green

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E. GREEN

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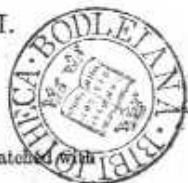
THE
PRETENDED DISCOVERY
OF A
ROMAN BATH
AT
BATH.

WITH REMARKS ON A RECENT PUBLICATION

ENTITLED

THE BATHES OF BATHE'S AYDE
IN THE REIGN OF CHARLES II.

"Ignorance is not known to be ignorance, until it be matched with
knowledge."—OLDE DICTE.



LONDON:
WYMAN & SONS, 74-76, GREAT QUEEN STREET,
LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS, W.C.
BATH: THE BOOKSELLERS.
1884.

Price One Shilling.

Gough Ad. B. 1. 113.

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"'Tis pleasant sure to see one's name in print,
A book's a book although there's nothing in't."
Byron.

BUT lately a book has been published in Bath to which attention has been drawn in every way that persistent advertisement can effect. It is entitled :—

"The Bathes of Bathe's Ayde in the Reign of Charles II., as illustrated by a Drawing of the King's and Queen's Bath [*sic*], 1675. Whereunto is annexed a Visit to Bath in the year 1675. By a 'Person of Quality.' By Charles E. Davis, F.S.A., &c."

It is intended here to offer a few pages of criticism, not only for the credit of a city claiming now, as ever, to be literary and archæological, —a city unique in character socially and historically, but because at the present time the liveliest interest of the antiquary is attracted towards it by reason of the alleged recent discovery of a large Roman bath.

The author of this book holds the position or office of City Architect, which in itself, if the name have any meaning, should afford no small advantage to any one who deals with local annals,

or who comes forward to enlighten the outer world on the results of his research, in connexion with either the mystic springs or other more prosaic events.

The borrowed title of the book first attracts attention. It is the title of a quaint old treatise on the Bath Waters published in 1572. Chosen here for reproduction, as appropriate to a work, the incidents in which—wholly different in their significance—are supposed to occur a century later, it is a pretentious misnomer. An old title to a new book is a legitimate practice often adopted with effect in these ingenious days of book-making and publishing; but the wit or felicitous application of such appropriation should be so obvious as to need no explanation, and to excite no feeling beyond that of spontaneous recognition. As it is, the title of "The Bathes of Bathe's [*sic*] Ayde" will be an impenetrable enigma to the majority of those who see the book; and to the few who perceive the historical plagiarism it will be a source of contemptuous amusement, as being a preposterous anachronism, and because of its implied assumption of bibliographical knowledge. With as much reason it might be called "The Story of Bladud's Pigs," or "The Eikon Basilike," for all that it has to do with "The Bathes of Bathes Ayde." This little book, written by John Jones, M.D., a medical Welshman, and a profound genealogist,

is extremely rare. The intention of the title is clear, but by the change here made in it the meaning is missed altogether. The "Bathes of Bathes," rendered plainly, would be the baths supreme above all baths; to be recognised without being named. By making the word Bathes *Bathe's*, the title is deprived of its true meaning. The baths of Bath's aid is nonsense. The aid is for the baths; not from Bath the city. Perhaps there may be detected a sub-intention to play upon the name, but this must be understood; the name of the city is not absolutely mentioned. Thus it will be seen that not only is the title inappropriate, but that it is an ignorant affectation. It is doubtful whether the author ever saw Jones's book; it is abundantly clear, as will be shown, that he never saw many of the books with which in the course of his work he takes very familiar liberties. This, however, could have been passed, if the book itself presented any redeeming historical features. It would be unworthy of a critic to find fault with the manner, if the matter, as a whole, were put together with comparative accuracy and some little regard to literary propriety and arrangement.

A drawing by J. Johnson, made about 1675, is the basis of the treatise. This is a drawing of much interest, no doubt, the object being manifestly to depict the habits and costumes, and something of the local scene around the baths at

that period. A simple description of this drawing, with so much of historical colouring as would have rendered it intelligible and interesting, would have been most desirable; instead of this, we have a reduced facsimile in Woodbury-type, so blurred that, even if the description were lucid and satisfactory, it would serve no other purpose than to irritate and disgust. But as is the picture so is the letter-press description. The author is not satisfied to accept the drawing for what it is, but he seeks to invest it with a significance and a realism which never had existence except in the imagination of the draughtsman. The picture is purely ideal. It is here simply made the subject for exaggeration and the exercise of much ignorant pedantry. Even this could have been borne and left unnoticed if incidentally some facts worth recording had been given, or if the true rendering of the chief events suggested by the picture had been understood. Not only is this not so as regards the picture, but every subject in the book has been surrounded with a mass of historical error and blundering quite inexcusable in any one presuming to teach and yet refusing to seek or notice the best authorities. These defects are rendered the more intolerable from the calm complacency with which the statements are expressed in language, too, full of inaccuracies and vulgarisms. On nearly every page is found the objectionable "I," and then the "our" and the "we." There

is the occasional assumption of the dignity of the historian and then the rapid descent to the style of the showman. The "circuit of the walls being completed, 'I' should mention that at the time of which 'we' are speaking," &c., &c., is a sample of what repeatedly occurs throughout the book.

Now as to the value of the facts.

On p. 11 it is said that Geoffrey of Monmouth, William of Malmesbury, Leland, and *a few others*, speak of the baths, but give no description of their extent or form, with the exception of Leland, "who visited Bath in 1542." Amongst the "few others" surely Holinshed may find a place, and he gives a very animated description of both the baths and the waters. Leland's remarks allude to his visit in 1533, and the very nature of this oversight, to those who know Leland, will be a clear proof that Mr. Davis knows nothing of him.

Mr. Davis says, p. 11, that Dr. Johnson, in 1634, "gave a slight sketch" of the waters.

He did nothing of the kind. His book, a very scarce one, had reference to the Pharmaceutical Botany and the Thermæ.

Mr. Davis asserts, p. 11, that Gilmore "published his map in 1694."

He did not. His survey was made in 1694, but the map, with some modifications, was not published for some twenty years later.