The Literature and Writers of Reading and the District.¹

THE history of the literature of Reading begins at a very early date, and the writings of some of the abbots and monks who lived in the twelfth century are still preserved. The amount of literary work which was performed in the abbeys of England must have been immense, and Reading possessed one of the most important abbeys in England.

The first Reading author of whom we read is Abbot Hugh, the first abbot of Reading, afterwards Archbishop of Rouen, where he died 1134 A.D. His works are enumerated in Cave's *Historia Literaria*, ii., 220, and include three books on memory, with other little works; *Life of St. Adjutor*; letters against heretics of his own times, and several letters and treatises.

Another Hugh, the eighth abbot, was a famous writer, and is described by Leland as a "skilful divine, from education and diligence in his studies; and that in the course of his reading he produced many elaborate observations upon subjects which were abstruse to inexperienced students. His theological questions are not trivial, but give light to difficult passages of Scripture."

There is a MS. copy of these questions in the Cotton Library. He also wrote a treatise, *De Orthodoxâ fide*, in seven books, together with some letters to Pope Celestine II., and a treatise upon heresies in Brittany, entitled *Super heresibus in Armorico solo natis*.

Robert, the Monk of Reading, who travelled in Spain for mathematical knowledge about 1143, is a well-known character. A certain Dr. Wallis, in his introduction to a treatise on algebra, writes, that Robert of Reading, who travelled in Spain on account of the mathematics, did then translate the Alcoran out of Arabic in Latin, as appears by his epilogue to that translation, and the preface of Petrus Cluniacensis thereunto. Another Robert of Reading, a monk of Westminster, wrote a Chronological History of England from 1299 to 1325, entitled *Chronicon Roberti de Reding* (Harleian MSS., No. 685, 3, fo. 173). Amongst the works of these early times which mark the growth of Papal power in England, we may mention those of William

¹ Read at the Annual Meeting of the Library Association, Reading, 1890.

Boteler, a Franciscan monk, *De indulgentiis pontificum*, *Lectura super Magistrum Sententiarum*, and a MS., *Determinatio*, against translating the Scriptures into the vulgar tongue, which is preserved in the library of Merton College. He lived about 1400, and his latter work may have been directed against Wicliffe's translation of the Bible.

Reading has the distinguished honour of producing the first specimen of another branch of literature—the metrical or poetical kind—and the spring song, “Summer is y-comen in,” written by a monk of Reading Abbey, is said to be the most ancient English song with musical notes attached. 1240 A.D.—

“Summer is y-comen in,
Loud sing Cuckoo ;
Groweth seed,
And blometh mead
And spring’th the wood now :
Sing Cuckoo ;
Ewe bleateth after lamb,
Low’th after calf cow.
Bullock starteth,
Buck verteth,
Merry sing, Cuckoo !
Cuckoo, Cuckoo !
Well sings thou, Cuckoo !
Nor cease thou never now.”

I am now going to make a prodigious claim, and to venture to make mention of the honoured name of the “Father of English Song” in connection with the authors of Reading. No one would be rash enough to declare positively where Geoffrey Chaucer was born; although Leland, the biographer of England's first great poet, who lived nearest to his time, mentions Berkshire or Oxfordshire as the place of his birth. Chaucer has been compared to Homer, for whose birthplace seven cities contended, and whose descent was traced to the demi-gods. But the reason why I claim the right of including Chaucer in this list is, not merely on account of his frequent visits to this place (being attached to the Court of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, he would often come to Reading), but on account of his poem, “The Dream,” which describes the wedding of his patron with Blanche of Lancaster, performed within the walls of Reading Abbey. Speght says that “This dream, devised by Chaucer, seemeth to be a covert report of the marriage of John of Gaunt, the King's son, with Blanche of Lancaster, who after long love (during the time, whereof the

poet feigneth them to be dead), were in the end, by the consent of friends, happily married, figured by a bird bringing in his bill an herb, which restored them to life again." This wedding took place at Reading, May, 1359. The three months' feast and grand tournaments were celebrated on a great plain, under a wood, in a campaign, betwixt a river and a well, which probably describes the situation of the King's Mead.

John Latterbury (or Lattebiry) was a Franciscan of much learning. He wrote a valuable Commentary on the Lamentations of Jeremiah, which was completed in 1410, and the MS. preserved in the Merton Library. It was printed in 1482, and there is a copy in the library at Westminster Abbey, also at St. John's College, Oxford. This must have been one of the earliest books printed in this country. Two years after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Guttenburg and Faust completed the first printed book. The sack of Mayence in 1462 by Archbishop Adolphus dispersed the printers, and with them the secrets of their craft, and in the year 1474 the first publication of William Caxton appeared in England. Hence this book of John Latterbury, printed in 1482, comes very early in the history of English printed works. He wrote also an Explanation of the Psalms, a work on the Acts of the Apostles, and others,¹ some of which he bequeathed to the Friary at Reading.

The last author of Monastic Reading whom I will mention, is John Holyman, described by the last Abbot Hugh as a man "whose life as well as his writings proved him to be an eminent divine, and who lately preached at St. Paul's to a crowded audience, with such distinguished respect and admiration, that no sincere preacher of the Gospel was ever received with greater affection and applause by the inhabitants of that city." His life was a remarkable one, but upon that we may not dwell. He was made Bishop of Bristol, and wrote a treatise against Luther, and a defence of the validity of the marriage of Queen Catharine with Henry VIII., both in Latin.

The dissolution of the Abbey soon came, and with it the dissipation and partial destruction of the Library, which contained the labours of so many generations of Monastic writers, and which would have been so invaluable to future historians.

¹ *Distinctiones Theologicæ ; Lectiones Scripturarum ; Conciones variæ ; Alphabetum Morale ; Lectura Morales ; De Cuxuriâ Clericorum ; Loci Communes ;* and *A Commentary on the Prophecies of Jeremiah.*

Some of the MSS. were saved from the wreck. In the Wollascot MSS. there is a catalogue of the works which the library contained in the reign of Henry III., and several of the MSS. are now in the British Museum.

There is one other work which belongs to this period, and preceded the dissolution of the Abbey, being inscribed as follows: "To the Reverende Father in God, and his singuler good lorde, the lorde Hugh Faryngton, Abbot of Redynge, his pore client and perpetuall servaunt, Leonard Cockes, desyreth longe and prosperous lyfe, with encrease of honour." It is a very rare book, entitled, *The Art or Crafte of Rhetoryke*, and written by Leonard Cockes, one of the masters of Reading School. The subject is divided into four parts—*Invention*, *Judgment*, *Disposition* and *Eloquence in Speaking*; but only one part has come down to us, that on *Invention*, "which is the chief point" (according to our author), "belonging to a Rhetorician, and which is more difficult than the other iij., so that it ones had, there is no great maistry to come by the residue." He purposes subsequently to "Assay himselfe in ye other parte, and so make and accomplish ye hole werk." The book was printed "in London in Fletestrete, by Saynt Dunstone's Chyrche, at the sygne of the George by me Robert Redman. The year of our lorde God, a thousand, five hundred and two and thyrtie. Cum privilegio." It is refreshing to find the old schoolmaster busy with his "Rhetoryke," and calmly pursuing his studies upon abstract questions when most men's minds were in confusion and unrest, and the era of great political and religious change had dawned.

Mr. Cockes' grammatical tastes were shown in his *Commentaries on William Lilly's Construction of the eight parts of Speech*.

The progress of the use of the English language in regard to Holy Scripture, and the irresistible longing of the inhabitants of this country to have the Word of God in a tongue "understanded of the people," are evident in many writings of this period. Although Mr. Cockes was of opinion that it was owing to negligence or "else fals persuacions" that the people were put to the learning of other sciences or ever they have attayned any meane knowledge of the Latin tongue, he hearkened to the popular cry for English books on Holy Scripture, and translated *The Paraphrase of S. Paul's epistle to Titus*, written by his friend Erasmus, into English.

The troublous times which followed were not conducive to much literary production, although we find Leland, the great

historian, writing his *Itinerary* and his *Cyanea Cantio* (1546). This latter may be claimed as a Reading book, or a book about Reading, as it contains a very accurate description of the town. Men's minds were too much occupied with religious questions, and the appeal was not to the press but to the fire and stake. They were literally burning questions, and Reading can boast of one who suffered for conscience' sake—Joceline or Julines Palmer. He was one of the masters of Reading School, and was betrayed to his enemies by a Thomas Thackham, who coveted his post, and afterwards succeeded him. Thackham was attacked in the first edition of *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, and the controversy which arose is preserved in Strype's *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, vol. iii.

It was not until the reign of the Virgin Queen that a feeling of security was restored to the nation, and literature began to flourish again.

I may notice here a very curious and almost unique book, the date of which is uncertain, but it must have been printed earlier than 1600. The title is *The History of Thomas, of Reading, or the six worthy Yeomen of the West*, and the author was a certain Thomas Deloney, a famous ballad-maker of his day, who wrote also *The Garland of Goodwill*, a poetical collection of local tales and historical ditties. He lived during the age of the development of the Elizabethan drama, and was associated with some of the original actors of Shakespeare's plays. It is recorded that he had a quarrel with Kemp, one of the players. His book contains a mixture of historical fact and fictitious narrative, very similar to the historical novels of modern times. Coates speaks very slightly of the author, and calls his work "the fabulous and childish penny history, called Thomas, of Reading;" but that criticism seems rather too severe. At any rate, other people thought differently of the work, for it was edited in 1632 for the sixth time, corrected and enlarged. In the Roxburgh sale one copy of the edition of 1636 was sold for £5 15s. 6d. It was reprinted in 1857. The hero is a certain Thomas Cole, a rich clothier, of Reading, who lived in the time of Henry I. My readers will be glad to hear that the six worthy yeoman all came to a good end; all grew wealthy; the King loved them, and before his death expressed a wish to be "buried among those good clothiers who living were his heart's comfort."

¹ I have serious doubts whether there were any clothiers in Reading in Henry I.'s time.

I now come to an important work by a learned writer, John Blagrave. In 1585 he published the *Mathematical Jewel, Margarita Mathematica, per Joannem Blagravum, Readigensem, conditum, editum et sculptum*. This wonderful instrument, of which a representation is given at the beginning of the work, is thus described by its inventor: "It performeth with wonderful dexterity whatsoever is to be done by Quadrant, Ship, Circle, Cylinder, Ring, Dyall, Horoscope, Sphere and Globe. The use of the Jewel is so abundant and ample that it leadeth any man practising thereupon, the direct pathway through the whole arts of astronomy, cosmography, geography, topography, navigation, longitude of regions, &c., with great and incredible speede, plainnesse, facilities and pleasure, by John Blagrave, of Reading, gentleman and well-wisher to the mathematickes, who hath cut all the prints or pictures of the whole work with his own hands." Folio ed. "imprinted at London by Walter Verge, dwelling in Fleet lane, over against the Maidenhead. 1585." The writer was probably unknown before the publication of this his earliest work, as we may conclude from some original verses in the preface, which mark the author as a good mathematician, but a very indifferent poet. He writes:—

"And London laughs to think she scarce doth know his face.
How comes he then to link with Vranes worthy grace?
No wight I see puts forth his pen my needles praise to paint,
But even alone a countrie drone I stand in this constraint."

He tells us how much time he spent in measuring land, platting, and surveying and, as Mr. Granger observes, "this excellent mathematician did not pursue phantoms, but reduced his speculations to practice, his friends, his neighbours, and the public reaping the fruits of his studies." He also published *Baculum Familiare Catholicon sive generale*. A book of a Staffe, newly invented by the author, called the Familiar Staffe: as well as that it can be made familiarlie to walk with, as for that it performeth the geometrical mensurations. Newlie compiled, and at this time published for the speciall helpe of shooting in great ordinance, and may as well be employed for measuring land." By John Blagrave, gent, 1590 (4to). Also, in 1609, his last work (Anthony Wood supposes that he wrote several others, which were lost), was published, entitled, *The Art of Dialling*, in two parts. London, 1609 (4to).

William Burton, vicar of S. Giles, may be mentioned as the author of an *Exposition on the Lord's Prayer*. He is described

as a Minister of the Word at Reading. The work was published in 1594, and dedicated to Robert, Earl of Essex. I may mention also another writer of this period, who rejoiced in the name of John Smith. He published the *Doctrine of Prayer*. London, 1595. 4to. And perhaps some others; but Anthony Wood quaintly observes, "It is a difficult matter to distinguish his works from others of both his name and time." Evidently the name of John Smith does not conduce to an author's immortality!

At the beginning of the reign of King James I., Reading possessed a distinguished theologian in the person of John Denison, D.D., who was successively the vicar of the three old parish churches of this town—S. Laurence's, 1603; S. Giles', 1612; S. Mary's, 1614. His book, entitled, *A three-fold resolution necessary to Salvation*, describing Earth's vanity, Hell's Horror and Heaven's felicity, published in London, in 1616, ran through five editions. He opposed the great Roman Catholic writer, Cardinal Bellarmine, on the subject of Auricular Confession, in a work entitled, *De Confession Auricularis vanitate adversus Cardinalis Bellarmini Sophismata*. Oxon, 1621. His work on the *Justification of kneeling at the Sacrament* (London, 1619), shows the growth of some of the Puritan ideas, which increased so rapidly during the succeeding reign.

This seems to have been an age for theology, and another very learned and scholarly divine, Thomas Taylor, who was called the "illuminated doctor," brother of Theophilus Taylor, vicar of S. Lawrence's, frequently resided and wrote in Reading. I will only mention one of his works (a copy of which is in the Library), entitled, *The Parable of the Sower and the Seed*, declaring in foure severall grounds, among other things—

- (1) How farre an Hypocrite may goe in the way towards Heaven, and wherein the sound Christian goeth before him, and
- (2) In the last and best ground, largely discourseth of a good heart, describing by very many signs of it, digested into a familiar method; which of itselife is an entire treatise. And also
- (3) From the constant fruit of the good ground justifyeth the doctrine of the Perseverance of Saints, oppugneth the fifth article of the late Arminians; and shortly and plainly answereth their most colourable arguments and evasions. Sold at the signe of the Gilded Cup, in Goldsmith's Rowe, in Cheapside, 1621.

The writer was evidently a Calvinist. The following part of the dedication to the Mayor and Corporation, and others, may be interesting to Reading men as a description of the prosperous state of the town in the reign of James I. :—

“ And as this famous towne, for pleasant situation and rich commodities, for prudent government and civill state, but especially for the plentiful means of knowledge and grace, is as a light set up in a candlestick, as a tower on the top of an hill, and a beacon to the whole countrie; so your godly care may be so much the more to walk worthy your great privileges. I praise God to see the house of God so frequented, and yourselves can confesse how He hath been a good paymaster already, for some good affections this way in much increase added of late years to the outward estate both of your public corporation and many private persons.”

At this period the minds of the people of this country were completely engrossed with religious and political questions; and this is reflected to an appreciable extent in the literature of this town; until at length conflict of argument was blended with conflict of bodily force, and above the tumult of civil war arose the voices of the leaders in the war of thought. First we find Dr. Page, master of Reading School in 1628, a follower of Archbishop Laud, then Bishop of London, publishing a *Treatise in defence of bowing at the name of the Lord*, which was opposed by one party, and supported by Laud, it being in defence of a canon of the Church, and at the King's desire.

Archbishop Laud's connection with this town is well known, and his memory still revered. With his melancholy history and character we do not concern ourselves now, and it is only as an author that I am permitted to speak of him. His literary productions were not voluminous; the troublous times in which he lived, and the leading part he was called upon to take, doubtless prevented him from producing much. But he was a great patron of learning, and his enemies have said that *his will was the best thing he ever wrote!* However, his conferences with Fisher, the Jesuit, published in 1639, are some of the ablest of our controversial theology. Also his sermons, remains, diary and the history of his troubles and trial, edited by H. Wharton, were first published in 1695, in two vols. The number of pamphlets which were issued about the time of his death is amazing, and bear the pleasing titles of the *Great Impostor Unmasked*, a *Magazine of Scandall of two Infamous Ministers*,

England's Rejoicing in the Prelate's Downfall, &c. One hundred and twenty-two of these tracts were collected in three vols in 1691. One writer is ingenious in endeavouring to prove that Archbishop Laud corresponded to the "beast" in Rev. viii. and xv., "not the great beast (=Pope), but another, yet a very beast." He makes the numbers in Laud's name correspond to the mystical 666.

W = 2	V =	...	...	...	...	10
I	„	...	...	...	...	1
LL	„ 2 x 50 =	...	...	...	...	100
L	„	...	...	...	...	50
A	„ no numerical No.	...	...	...	...	
V	„	...	...	...	...	5
D	„	...	...	...	...	500
= Grand total						665

I cannot refrain from mentioning one pamphlet, which I take to be genuine, a petition presented to Parliament by Laud from the Tower of London, wherein he desires that he may not be transported beyond seas into New England, in regard to his extraordinary age and weakness. "His intentions were not to make an innovation of religion, but to work such a conformation and likeness in both, that Her Majesty's opinion might be drawn on, and induced to embrace Truth, holding thereby to be a speedy means of Her Majesty's conversion. Their differences were not fundamental, and of faith, and he desired union and comprehension." There is something very pathetic in his prayer, "not to suffer your petitioner to be transported, to endure hazard of seas, and long tediousness of voyage into those transmarine parts, and cold countries, which would soon bring your petitioner's life to a period." He was apparently unconscious of the worse fate which awaited him.

In 1642 the civil war breaks out. We find Dr. Wilde, vicar of St. Giles', preaching before the King at Oxford, and writing two comedies, which were acted before the Court in St. John's College Hall, *The Hospital of Lovers*, and *Hermophilus*, a comedy in Latin.

Then we have a Presbyterian vicar of St. Lawrence's Thomas Gilbert, who lived to a good old age, and wrote a poem, called *England's Passing Bell*, written after the year of the Plague, the Fire of London, and the Dutch War, 1675. Also at ninety years of age he wrote (English title) *A Gratu-*

latory Poem on the auspicious descent of King William into Ireland, and on his safe return from Ireland. This must have been published after the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

But Mr. Gilbert's long life has carried us past the troublous period of the Commonwealth, and we must retrace our steps. While the tumults of war were heard on all sides there was one learned man and noted antiquary who was quietly pursuing his studies, and making his collections, as if he were quite unconscious of the confusion around him. I refer to Elias Ashmole, who is connected with Reading through his wife, the daughter of William Foster, Recorder of Reading. Although his wife gave him the honour of being included amongst Reading authors, she did not give him much pleasure in other ways, and I believe Mr. Ashmole was forced to add many *matrimonial jars* to his collection of other antique ware! He made his name and reputation by his *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, published in 1652. Also he wrote *Chemical Collections, expressing the Progress of secret Hermitic Science*, in 1654; also *Institution, Laws and Ceremonies of the Noble Order of the Garter*, 1672. No one can be wise at all times, and Mr. Ashmole wrote a book in 1660, called *The Way of Bliss*, to prove the possibility of finding the philosopher's stone. As the founder of the museum which bears his name, and one of our foremost antiquarians, Elias Ashmole will be remembered. He wrote a work on *The Antiquities of Berks* in three volumes, a copy of which is in the Reading Library.

Another Puritan vicar of St. Lawrence's, who was appointed in 1651, was a prolific writer, and produced *The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption*, largely and practically handled by Simon Ford, B.D., minister of Gospel at Reading, 1655. Like many others of that time, he seems to have trimmed his sails according to the wind; for in spite of his Puritan tendencies, at the Restoration he wrote *A Panegyrick on Charles I.*; also some sermons *On the King's Return*, London, 1660; *The Loyal Subject's Indignation*; *The Lord's Wonders in the Deep, on the Duke of York's Victory against the Dutch*, 1665; and in 1688 he published *A New Version of the Psalms of David*. Dr. Ford was probably a half-hearted Puritan; he belonged to that curious race of beings—political parsons, and, living so near, had doubtless heard of his neighbour, the Vicar of Bray.

The vicar of St. Mary's, Christopher Fowler, was a thorough-going Roundhead; as is declared by his work *Dæ-*

monium Meridinaum, or Satan at Noon, dedicated to his Highness, Oliver, Lord Protector of England, Scotland, Ireland and the dominions thereto belonging, 1655. This work was directed against Dr. Pordage, vicar of St. Lawrence, the author of a pamphlet, *The Case of Reading Rightly Stated*, which according to Fowler, was "blasphemous and unclean." You will observe that controversialists in those days did not mince words. They called a spade a spade, if they did not apply to it a more opprobrious epithet. This Dr. Pordage asserted that he had sensible communion with spirits, that he fought with a fiery dragon, that a coach drawn by fiery tigers and lions attacked his chimney and could not be dislodged till it was dug out with pickaxes.

I may mention here William Creed, a Royalist and eminent divine and scholastic disputant, a Fellow of St. John's and Professor of University. He wrote a book entitled *The Refuter Refuted*.

The works of another member of the family of Blaggrave, Joseph Blaggrave, a great enthusiast in astrological studies, are worthy of record. He wrote a work entitled *An Introduction to Astrology*, which was published after his death by Obadiah Blaggrave in 1662, and dedicated to Elias Ashmole, "eminently accomplished in all ingenious literature." The work shows very clearly some of the absurdities and pretensions of astrology, and professes to contain the life of an Ephemeris, and how to erect a figure of heaven at any time proposed, also significations of the houses, planets, signs and aspects, with plain and familiar instructions for the resolution of all manner of questions, whereby you are enabled to chuse such times as are proper and conducive to the perfection of any matter of business whatsoever. Also an absolute method for rectifying and judging nativities, the significations of portents, and directions with new and experienced rules touching revolutions and transits.

I will refer now to another work by the same author, Joseph Blaggrave, his *Astrological Practise of Physick*, discovering the true way to cure all kinds of diseases and infirmities which are naturally incident to the body of man, being performed by such herbs and plants which grow within our own nation, directing the way to distil and extract their virtues, and making up medicines; also a discovery of some notable secrets worthy our knowledge, relating to a discovery of all kinds of evil, whether natural or such which comes from sorcery or witchcraft, or by

being possessed by an evil spirit, directing how to cast forth said evil spirit out of anyone possessed, with sundry examples thereof, 1671.

I have recently met with another work by this same author, Joseph Blagrave, published in 1675: *Epitome of the Art of Husbandry, comprising all things necessary for the Improvement of it*. It discourses of Ploughing, Sowing, Grafting, Gardening, Ordering of Flowers and Herbs, Bees; and also of Gentlemen's Heroic Exercise (Riding), Horses, Cows, Sheep, Hogs—their natures, uses, diseases and remedies."

Our next author is one of whom any town ought to be proud—Dr. Lloyd, vicar of St. Mary's, and afterwards Bishop of St. Asaph, one of the seven Bishops who were committed to the tower for opposing James II. He published several "seasonable discourses" in support of the national religion; several sermons, which were preached before Charles II., James II., and William and Mary; several incomplete works on chronology and Biblical subjects; and we are indirectly indebted to him for two important works, *Pole's Synopsis* a most valuable and stupendous commentary, and also Bishop Burnett's *History of the Reformation*, a standard history, in which work Dr. Lloyd helped considerably. Both these books were undertaken on the advice and with the assistance of Bishop Lloyd. From Swift's letters we find that the poor Bishop, who lived till he was ninety, became weak-minded in his old age, as the writer states "that he went to Queen Anne to prove to her Majesty from Scripture that in four years there would be a war of religion, that the King of France would be 'Protestant, and the Pope-dome destroyed.'"

There was also a William Lloyd, Bishop of Worcester, born at Tilehurst, author of a valuable historical work on the early British Church. Also Simon Lowth, vicar of Tilehurst, 1662, was the author of the ablest manuals of Catechesis ever written.

We come now to a work which marks the intolerance in religious matters which prevailed in the reign of the "Merry Monarch." The victim was Joseph Coale, who belonged to the Society of Friends, and was imprisoned for refusing to take the oath of allegiance, and died in gaol 1670. The book is entitled *Some Account of the Life and Sufferings of Joseph Coale, collected out of his Writings, who after six years' imprisonment in Reading Gaol, died a prisoner for his Christian testimony*. It appears that he did not refuse to acknowledge the King's authority, but he

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refused to *swear* allegiance. The book was published in 1706, and is dedicated to the Friends of Truth at Reading, to the children of light in the West, and in the Fleet end of the parish of Mortimer. Wales and Cornwall seem to have been strongholds of Quakerism.

At the commencement of the eighteenth century we find two eloquent and able authors in the persons of the vicars of St. Mary's: William Reeves, who preached and published a famous sermon *On the Fatal Consequences of Bribery* at the time of an election, which had such an effect that many returned the bribes which they had received and voted another way; also *The Apologies of the Fathers* (2 vols.), 1709; and Francis Fox, a well-known writer, who contributed the valuable addition to Biblical literature, *The N. T. Explained* (in two vols.), 1722. There are a large number of references set under the text, together with marginal reading and notes. Several other works were written by the same author.

In 1723 we see the rise of newspaper literature, and welcome the appearance of the first number of the *Reading Mercury*, one of the oldest newspapers in the kingdom. It was called the *Reading Mercury or Weekly Entertainer*, and many generations of Reading citizens have been entertained and enlightened by its columns of news since the year 1723. A reprint of the first number has recently appeared, so I need not describe it; but I may mention that it was started by the energy of Mr. John Watts, one of the leading members of the Corporation, the author in 1749 of the pamphlet with the alarming title, *The Black Scene Opened*, which was an attack upon the Corporation for the mismanagement of the Kendrick Charities.

Essay writers have not been plentiful in Reading, but we find some fair specimens of this kind of literature in a book entitled, *Peregrinations of the Mind through most general and interesting Subjects usually agitated in Life*, by Mr. William Baker, who was born in Reading in 1742. He treats of various subjects, "Happiness," "Love," "War," and there is an interesting essay "On the Stage," answering objections originally suggested by bigotry and prejudice against theatrical amusements. He wrote also *Theses Græcæ Latinæ Selectæ*, in 1780, and several detached poems.

I have been able to find only one book of travels; evidently Reading men are not given to roaming. This is a work in two volumes, by C. Thompson, Esq., on his travels through France,

Italy, Turkey, the Holy Land, Arabia and Egypt. Printed by J. Newbery and C. Micklewright, at the Bible and Crown, in the Market Place, 1744. He seems to have been a very observant gentleman, and puts down his reflections in English plain and unadorned. His reflections upon French cooking are interesting:

"The French are more extravagant in their dress than in their diet. They often keep meat so long before they dress it that Englishmen would think it fit for nothing but the dunghill, and were it not for herbs and high seasoning it would scarce be eatable. The wines are small, but good of their kind, light and easy upon the stomach, and give little disturbance to the brain."

I find next a contribution to historical studies, viz., *An Historical Review of the Transactions of Europe from the commencement of the war with Spain in 1739 to the Insurrection in Scotland in 1745*, by Samuel Boyse, M.A. Two volumes. Printed by D. Henry, Friar Street, 1747. Our author certainly chose very stirring times for his history, which describes the "War of Austrian Succession," the Battle of Dettingen (the last occasion when an English King, George II., commanded his army in person), and the Seven Years' War. He also wrote some miscellaneous works, serious and humorous, in verse and prose, designed for the amusement of the fair sex at Reading (1740). There is good sense in his reflections on private defamation, occasioned by a visit to my Lady Tattle, on which occasion ten thousand characters were torn in pieces, the reputation of whole families havocked with a general massacre.

But we must leave Mr. Boyse and his various studies, and pass on to the poetical labours of Mary Latter. Poets have not been very plentiful in Reading, but there are a few who would aspire to the title. There are two MS. plays by Thomas Singleton, which were acted at Hoxton Wells in 1688. A few other occasional poets of the Ponderous School have been noticed. A witty vicar of St. Lawrence's, Dr. Phanuel Bacon, who had a strong liking for puns, wrote, "The Kite" in 1719; five dramatic pieces, published together in one volume, called *Humorous Ethics*, and was the author of a ballad called *The Snipe*, which has been pronounced one of the best ballads in the English language. It has been preserved in the Oxford Sausage, a delicacy of which I have not been able to taste. In 1715 was born Richard Cole, otherwise known as Poet Cole, who lived in St. Mary's Butts, and wrote some poems of a serious and religious nature.

But Mary Latter seems to have been the first voluminous poet. I have read some of her productions, but have not been much impressed by her great talent. I will take as a specimen of her works, her *Siege of Jerusalem, by Titus Vespasian, a Tragedy*. It was rejected by several managers of theatres, and when I read the following "poetry" you will not be surprised:

"As General of the Army I demand
On what pretences you presume to ask
The favour and protection of the Romans?
I need not say the vices of your people
Compel me to proceed with care and caution,
And I forbear extending my protection
To fugitives, till I am first assured
No artifice, no treachery, or deceit
Lurks under their appearance of submission."
Etc., etc., etc.

This was published in 1762, with a long essay by R. Cole, of Reading, on the mystery and mischief of stage craft, abusing the managers roundly for daring to reject this precious play, and defending it from certain criticisms which had been passed upon it. One is very sorry for the poor lady, who describes herself as being "immersed in business and in debt, sometimes madly hoping to gain a competency, sometimes justly fearing dungeons and distress." She published her miscellaneous works in prose and verse, and some other productions of her pen.

At the commencement of one of these books I find this spirited defiance of all critics:

"Let 'em censure, what care I,
The herd of critics I defy:
Let the wretches know I write
Regardless of their grace or spite."

Of the great scholar, divine and Christian poet, James Merrick, Reading may be justly proud. It would take too long to record fully his works, which cover a wide range of literature, and I will content myself with referring to two of his best known works—*The Psalms in English Verse*, published by J. Carnan & Co., of Reading (1765), and his *Annotations on the Psalms*, in 1768, by the same publishers. In the latter work the great learning and scholarship of the author are fully called into play. He shows how some of the Greek poets copied from the Hebrew Psalms; for example, Callimachus' hymn in celebrating Appollo's approach to his temple is almost word for word the same as Psalm xxiv., "Lift up your heads, O ye

gates," &c., which describes the entrance of the ark into Jerusalem. Although Mr. Merrick's version of the Psalms has received much praise, and however useful it may be as a commentary, I do not consider that it marks the author as a distinguished poet. I will give two examples of his style :

" O, how blest the man whose ear
Impious counsel shuns to hear,
Who nor loves to tread the way
Where the sons of folly stray,
Nor their frantic mirth to share
Seated in Derision's Chair."

Or again :

" A race by God unblest who rear
A fruitless toil sustain :
If God to shield the town forbear
The watchman wakes in vain."

There is another work of vast utility of which Reading may also be proud to claim the author—I refer to *Lempriere's Classical Dictionary*, a work of world-wide reputation, and which first saw the light in Reading (by Reading publishers) in 1788. Lempriere was a master at the Reading School.

Maria Edgeworth, the great novelist and friend of Sir W. Scott, was born in Reading in 1767, but spent the greater part of her life in Ireland. Her father, Richard Edgeworth, lived some time at Hare Hatch, whose autobiography and memoirs were published by his accomplished daughter.

St. Giles' possessed a distinguished divine in 1775 in the person of William Cadogan, who published several sermons; and his life was written by Richard Cecil, and published in 1798. Judge Talfourd speaks of him as "Mild charity's unspotted priest."

Dr. Valpy is a well-known author, and Valpy's *Delectus* a well-known work, which is not always received with that veneration and gratitude by youthful Latin scholars which one might expect. Besides school books he wrote a *Course of Nature urged on Principles of Analogy* (1839), *Poetical Chronology of Ancient and English History*, *Principia Historiæ Naturalis*, etc. Under his editorship some poems, odes, prologues and epilogues, spoken on public occasions at Reading School, were published in London in 1804. The last two lines of one of these are admirable :

" Her willing ensigns kind applause shall wave,
And Oxford weave the wreath which Reading gave."

At the beginning of this century we find a distinguished historian and scholar at St. Mary's in the person of Dr. Milman, afterwards Dean Milman. In the study at the vicarage his *History of the Jews* was written. His Bampton Lectures were published in Reading. He is the author of that beautiful hymn, which has often been so ruthlessly mutilated, "When our heads are bowed with woe," of the "Martyr of Antioch," and other poems.

We must not pass over another eminent literary vicar of St. Mary's at the beginning of the century—Archdeacon Nares, who was the founder of and chief contributor to the *British Critic*, and the author of *Elements of Orthœpy* (1784), a systematic, perspicuous and most useful work; he wrote also some discourses and essays, and a *Glossary of Words, Phrases, Names and Allusions to Customs and Proverbs*—an excellent work, published in 1822.

Our great local historian, Charles Coates, whose *History and Antiquities of Reading*, published in 1802, is so invaluable, must be mentioned. It is far superior to any other history of the town, and is a great contrast to Man's *History*, which is poor, unreliable and full of silly conjecture.

In illustrative literature, as early as 1791, a book containing eight excellent engravings of Reading Abbey, by C. Tomkins, was published; and admirers of good printing and engraving will respect the name of John Snare, who published six numbers of his *Environs of Reading*, edited by J. G. Robertson. The paper, type and illustrations are quite perfect, and are as good as can be found before the days of *Harper's Magazine*. Snare wrote the *History and Pedigree of a Portrait of Charles I.*, painted by Velasquez in 1623, which the author claimed to have in his possession.

Another mathematical writer appears on the scene in the person of Francis Reynard, the master of the Mathematical, French and Commercial School, Reading. He wrote a book called *Geometria Legitima, or the Elementary System of Theoretical Geometry*. From a brief examination of its contents I think it may be shortly described as Euclid spoilt.

In Hearne's MS. Diaries in the Bodleian Library there is an account of a visit to Reading and Silchester, published in *Letters to Eminent Persons* in 1813.

The following may be interesting to Reading men:—"I took two vols. of *Leland's Itinerary*, and found it very exact.

Reading is very pleasantly situated; nothing near so famous now for its clothing as it was formerly. The houses are mean, streets broad and unpaved. The houses are owned principally by Mr. Blagrove, and his interest in them being only for lives, there is no likelihood of their being rebuilt."

In the year 1810 a book appeared from the press of Messrs. Snare and Man, which made considerable impression on the minds of the people of this town, and touched severely some of their weak points. I refer to *The Stranger in Reading*, a series of letters from a traveller to his friend in London. I do not think that the identity of the "Stranger" has ever been discovered; and perhaps it was as well for him that he remained *incognito*, or he might have suffered severely at the hands of the enraged townspeople. Amongst other playful reflections upon the state of the roads, the incapacity of corporations, &c., he remarked that he agrees with a traveller, who, after residing at Reading for a few days, said "that the further he travelled westward the more he was convinced that the *wise men must have come from the East!*" He gives a sketch of the literature of Reading; but you will gather from the following statement that his remarks are not always to be depended upon:—"The soil of Reading has not been very productive of men of genius, and the few names here recorded have added very little to the general stock of literature of the country." He rightly mentions that Robert Grossetete (*Anglicè*, Thickhead), Bishop of Lincoln, was consecrated here in 1235: but adds the spiteful remark that "the family of Thickhead must have been originally numerous, as many of their *descendants* are still to be found in various parts of the town."

He concludes his sketch by a tribute of praise to Mr. Le Noir, who published several poems and prose works in 1825, among which were *Village Anecdotes* (three vols.); and to Miss M. R. Mitford, who, in the words of the "Stranger," "is a young lady of great poetical talents, whose purity of sentiment and elegance of diction are equal to those of our best poets, while she excels most of them in the chastity of her style, and the harmony of her verse." For *once* the "Stranger" appears to have been right in his judgment.

The works of this distinguished authoress are too well known to require enumeration or comment, but one of her novels ought to be mentioned, and that is *Belford Regis, or Sketches of a Country Town*.

Belford Regis is none other than Reading itself. In the preface Miss Mitford states that the descriptions of the scenery of Belford Regis are taken from that "picturesque and interesting town with which she is so well acquainted, but that the inhabitants of Belford Regis exist only in these pages, and if any persons who after this protest shall obstinately persist in mistaking for fact that which the author herself declares to be fiction, I can only compare them to the sagacious gentleman, mentioned in the *Spectator*, who, upon reading the *Whole Duty of Man*, wrote the names of different people in the village where he lived at the side of every sin mentioned by the author, and turned the whole of that devout and pious treatise into a libel."

With Miss Mitford is connected another Reading author of renown, Sir Thomas N. Talfourd, D.C.L., one of the judges of the Court of Common Pleas, an accomplished orator, lawyer and poet. His great work was an English version of the *Ion* of Euripides, which was performed at Covent Garden, and achieved a marked success. He wrote also *Vacation Rambles*, *The Castilian*, *The Athenian Captive*, a tragedy, and *Glencoe*, a tragedy, and *Memorials of Charles Lamb*. He was a true poet; his memory still lives amongst us, and is held in veneration by all who knew him.

Dr. Doran must be included among the historians of Reading, and published an admirable history of the town in 1835. Poetry is not quite a forgotten art. Mr. George W. Edginton translated *Homer's Odyssey* into blank verse in two volumes, dedicated to the Earl of Derby, and published in 1869. It is a work of great merit, and shows the wonderful perseverance of the author, a Reading tradesman, who translated the whole of the *Odyssey* into English hexameters, and then re-translated it into blank verse.

Dr. Stevens has contributed numerous antiquarian and geological records to the literature of Reading, and his recent volume on *The History of St. Mary Bourne* is a standard work on the topography of Hants, a model of what a village history ought to be. The Rev. C. Kerry's *History of St. Lawrence's Church, Reading*, is one of the most complete histories of a parish church ever published.

The royal county has produced many noted writers besides those who are connected with this historical town. The parents of Pope retired from Lombard Street to Binfield in 1684, and the earliest poems of the great poet were written in a favourite

grove under a tree, upon which Lady Gower, an admirer of the poet, caused the words "Here Pope sung" to be cut in large letters in the bark. Pope speaks of his Binfield home as—

" My paternal cell,
A little house with trees arow,
And, like its master, very low."

He found a good friend in Sir William Trumball, of East-hampstead, who aided the budding poet, and whose son's tutor, Fenton, helped considerably in writing *Pope's Odyssey*.

Day, the author of *Sandford and Merton*, sleeps in Wargrave Churchyard. I ought not to pass over the great Bishop Butler, who was born at Wantage in 1622, one of the greatest divines of the English Church. I have often visited the room in which he was born.

The honoured name of Charles Kingsley is associated with this neighbourhood, although Eversley is just beyond the borders of our county, but it is almost superfluous to speak of the writings of a man whose works have been read and enjoyed by almost every Englishman.¹

Amongst living authors the name of the author of *Tom Brown's School Days* will always be remembered. He was born at Uffington, near the "White Horse," whose "scouring" he so lovingly describes in his charming book.

With this name I will conclude my account of Reading books and bookmen. I hope that I have not trespassed too long on your valuable time. I think that this local collection forms the most valuable part of our Public Library, and every librarian will do well to enrich his store of books with the works of local authors, which are so valuable to the historian and the antiquary. I am indebted for much of the information contained in this paper to the valuable collection of local books and pamphlets which the Public Library at Reading possesses. Your "poets' corners" are responsible, I am told, for a great deal of bad local poetry; but a well-stocked local collection is of immense assistance to the students of the past history of your town and neighbourhood.

P. H. DITCHFIELD,
Rector of Barkham.