XVII.—*On a Set of Table-knives in the British Museum made for John the Intrepid, Duke of Burgundy.* By O. M. DALTON, Esq., M.A., F.S.A.

Read 14th March, 1907.

IN the year 1855 the British Museum acquired a set of four knives with enamelled handles in a leather case decorated with incised designs. The handles are richly ornamented with shields of arms, mottoes, and floral motives in translucent enamel upon silver, the grip having in addition strips of the speckled maple-wood used in the manufacture of mazers. These knives deserve description and careful illustration both for their artistic merit and also for their historical interest, it being possible to identify the two different persons for whom the instruments and the sheath were severally made. These persons were John the Intrepid, Duke of Burgundy, father of Philip the Good, and his daughter Isabel, Countess of Penthievre.

The knives, which are four in number, two large and two small,^a formed a set as carried by the *écuyer tranchant* or esquire carver of a prince or great noble, and brought by him to the table when his lord had seated himself for the repast. The two larger, as we shall see below, were used by the esquire in carving; the two smaller probably by the lord himself for cutting up his meat and bread.

A few other knives, similar to those here described, are preserved in various collections, and of these the greater number belonged to the Dukes of Burgundy or their great retainers. They all bear the owner's arms in translucent enamel upon the pommels, and some are profusely decorated like those of John the Intrepid. But in others the ornament is less elaborate. In these examples the handle is all of gilt metal, with the mottoes, floral ornaments, and badges in low relief; only the shields are enamelled, and these are somewhat deeply sunk at the pommel end, not recurring upon the end nearest the blade. The following is a list of the

^a The total length of the two larger is 15 inches, that of the two smaller 9·4 and 8·3 inches; the blades of all four are now extremely thin. The knives were acquired with the Bernal Collection. They are reproduced on a small scale in the *Guide to the Mediæval Room* (British Museum, 1907), fig. 139, p. 180.

principal Burgundian knives or sets of knives existing in museums and collections as far as I have been able to ascertain them.^a

Knives with richly-enamelled handles :

1. The British Museum set of three knives here described, in decorated leather sheath, made for John the Intrepid, and apparently the oldest of the series.
2. Pair of knives in the Imperial Museum at Vienna with arms and motto (*aultre n'a(u)ray*) of Philip the Good, with the additions of a badge beneath the shields near the butts, and repeated immediately before the mottoes. This badge is the strike-a-light or *briquet de Bourgogne*. These knives (No. 38 in the *Toison d'Or* Catalogue) are very similar in style to No. 1, and have the same elaborate enamelled ornament.
3. Knife in the Wallace Collection at Hertford House (No. 765 in the Catalogue); very similar in every respect to No. 2, and bearing the same arms and motto. It was formerly in the collections of Signor Castellani and the Count de Nieuwerkerke. (Viollet le Duc, *Dictionnaire du mobilier français*, ii. 77.)
4. Knife in the Carrand Collection in the Bargello at Florence,^b enamelled, with the same arms repeated four times. It also bears the briquet and the motto *aultre n'aray*.
5. Wallace Collection (*Catalogue of Armour and Arms*, No. 749). Knife with the arms of Rollin, Chancellor of Philip the Good, and enamelled floral ornament, but no motto.
6. In the same Collection (Catalogue, No. 750). Knife with the arms of the Sire de Dancourt, grand master of artillery to Philip the Good. Here again there is no motto. The arms are only at the butt of the handle, but the remaining surface is richly decorated with enamelled floral ornaments.

^a Since this paper was read, several of the knives in the above list have been shown at the Exhibition of the Golden Fleece at Bruges (spring to autumn, 1907). They were mentioned in the *Catalogue de l'Exposition de la Toison d'Or*, to which references are given. It is possible that some of them may be reproduced in the large official work on the Exhibition, which is now in preparation.

^b *Catalogo del Reale Museo Nazionale di Firenze* (1898), p. 156, No. 855.

Knives of the less elaborate type :

1. The knife in the Museum of Le Mans, which is of exceptionally large size. It has the sunk enamelled shields on both sides near the butt, with arms of Philip the Good, his motto *aultre n'auray* in relief upon the handle, and the briquet executed in the same manner next the blade. With it is a cuir-boulli case, without cover, ornamented with scroll designs, and made to contain two large knives with one of smaller size. (*Toison d'Or* Catalogue, No. 37 ; Viollet le Duc, *Dictionnaire du mobilier français*, ii. 79 ; Hucher, *Bulletin de la Soc. d'Agriculture Sciences et Arts du Mans*, 1859.)
2. Similar knife in the Museum of the Louvre (Département du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance). Arms and motto the same as in No. 1, but instead of the briquet, a device composed of two Gothic letters *c* confronted, and united by a cord with tasselled ends.
3. Two knives in similar style with the same arms and motto in the Museum at Dijon. They are accompanied by a fine incised leather sheath, painted and gilded, on which the arms are repeated. L. Gonse, *Chefs d'œuvres des Musées de France : Sculptures, dessins, objets d'art*, pp. 151 (fig.), 152 (Paris, 1904). Viollet le Duc appears to have described these knives incorrectly.^a

With regard to the locality in which such knives were made, more than one indication is afforded by entries in the Burgundian inventories. In these registers, whenever a maker is named, he is usually described as resident either at Dijon or in Paris. An entry of the year 1374 is of especial interest, as it evidently relates to knives ornamented in much the same manner as our own.^b In this case the maker lived at Dijon, but the entry is not sufficient to decide the question ; and as the connexion of John the Intrepid with Paris^c was very close, our knives are perhaps as likely to have been made there as in the Burgundian capital. As will

^a Viollet le Duc, *Dictionnaire*, ii. 77.

^b On the 13th of February to "*Jaquot Le Topetet, coustelier, demorant à Dijon : 15 fr. pour 5 paires de cousteaux, enguaignez et garnis d'argent et d'esmail.*" This Le Topetet had been fournisseur to the Duke from 1372, and died in 1398. For other references see Bernard Prost, *Inventaires mobiliers, &c.* Index, s.v. *Couteliers*. The knives made for various dukes by the well-known cutlers of Langres seem to have been for the most part hunting knives or weapons.

^c He had a residence there, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, part of which still exists. See C. Enlart, *Manuel d'Archéologie française*, ii. 108.

be seen from the illustration (Plate XXXIX.), the enamelled ornament of the handles, which are all decorated in the same manner, consists of the shield of arms four times repeated, and of floral designs, either forming a continuous scroll, or composed of separate flowers. Detached flowers of the same kind alternate with the words of the motto, which is in every case repeated upon both sides, and reads: *s'il plaist a dieu*. At the back of the handles there are narrow bands of small quatrefoils reserved in the metal upon a blue enamelled ground. (Fig. 1.)

The colours used for the enamels are dark blue, red, purple, black, and translucent green. The silver base upon which the enamels are executed has been gilded throughout.

The arms upon the shields are Burgundy modern dimidiated with Hennegau (Hainault)-Holland. These must be the arms assumed by John the Intrepid in 1385, when as Count of Nevers he married Margaret of Bavaria, Countess of Hennegau and Holland.^a Presumably they would be borne by him until 1404, when he succeeded to the dukedom and assumed the arms of Burgundy, as seen upon his seals. It thus appears that the knives were made between the years 1385 and 1404; they are therefore older than the other examples previously mentioned, all of which seem to date from the time of Philip the Good.

The motto *S'il plaît à Dieu* is sufficiently vague in its tenour, and is such as any one might have adopted in the fourteenth or fifteenth century. I have been unable to find it elsewhere in connexion with John the Intrepid, and researches kindly made by M. Louis Paris,^b of the Bibliothèque Royale at Brussels, have not led to the desired result. The motto, or a variation of it, was used by the family of Kerlech in Brittany; and Chassant records a variant as adopted by an Order of the Holy Spirit said to have been founded in the early fourteenth century, by Louis King of Jerusalem and Sicily and Count of Provence.^c

Monsieur Paris notes, however, that the motto, as it appears on the knives,

^a H. Grote, *Stammtafeln*, 307 and 261; John Anderson, *Royal Genealogies*, 2nd ed. (London, 1736), Tables 360 and 352. Upon the knives Burgundy modern is differenced by the engrailing of the bordure.

As Countess of Nevers Margaret used upon her seals: 1, Burgundy modern; 2, Bavaria; 3, Burgundy ancient; 4, Hainault. In this case, owing to the dimidiation, the two Burgundy quarters are omitted.

For information as to these arms I am indebted to Mr. Max Rosenheim, F.S.A., and to Mr. W. H. St. John Hope.

^b At the instance of M. Destrée, director of the *Musée des arts décoratifs*, Brussels, who was good enough to transmit the inquiry to M. Paris.

^c The Order seems also to have been called *Droit Désir*.

SET OF TABLE KNIVES AND CASE IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM. ($\frac{1}{2}$ LINEAR.)

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is to be seen in the stained glass window of the choir in the church of Anderlecht, near Brussels. Here it accompanies the portrait of Barbe de Montfort, who is represented with her husband Maximilian de Hornes, seigneur of Gaesbeek, etc. etc. This at least proves that it was in use in the Low Countries at a time not very distant from that at which the knives were made.

Fig. 1 Pendant in the British Museum with monogram of Oliver of Blois and his wife Ysabel; and ornament on the backs of the knife-handles.

The cypher upon the sheath enables us to follow the history of these knives after they passed out of the possession of their original owner. It is composed of the letters Y and O, which, as Mr. Hope has pointed out, must represent the initials of Ysabel, daughter of John the Intrepid, and her husband, Oliver of Blois, Count of Penthièvre.^a The knives seem therefore to have become the property of Ysabel either as a wedding gift or else by the

terms of her father's will; and at some time or other she must have had a new case made for them. The British Museum possesses a small pendant, formerly enamelled, of the kind commonly used in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to decorate harness, on which a very similar cypher occurs. (Fig. 1.) The leather sheath itself is a fine example of its kind, ornamented with bold floral scrolls in a good style, and bearing in addition to the cypher the figure of a peasant carrying a hoe over his shoulder, the motto *J'endure*, and a badge consisting of a *chantepleure* or *arrosoir*, from the base of which drops of water are falling.^b (See Plate XXXIX.) The *chantepleure* was a watering-pot, usually

Fig. 2. Earthenware watering-pot in the British Museum.

^a James Anderson, *Royal Genealogies*, ii. Table 360.

^b For the *chantepleure* see Victor Gay, *Glossaire archéologique*, s.v. *arrosoir*. Examples found in London are figured in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, v. 345-6, where the story of Valentine of Milan is also told.

Two *chantepleures* were found in 1906 in the City Ditch north of All Hallows Church, London Wall. *Archæologia*, lx. 243.

of earthenware, in common use in the Middle Ages, and represented by a good example in the British Museum. (Fig. 2.) It consists of a globular vessel with narrow neck, and a flat bottom pierced with a number of holes, like the rose of a modern watering-pot. When used, it was immersed until full; the thumb or finger was then placed upon the neck, and the vessel lifted out of the water. As long as the thumb was kept in position the water remained in the vessel; the moment the thumb was raised, it commenced to fall in a shower or spray.

This utensil has a historical interest in that it was adopted as a badge by Valentine of Milan when, in 1407, her husband the Duke of Orleans was murdered in the streets of Paris by order of the very John the Intrepid for whom our knives were made.^a It is an obvious mourner's emblem, and with it the duchess adopted the motto "*plus ne m'est rien*," expressive of the inconsolable grief from which she died in the following year. Both badge and motto are found upon her tomb in the church of the Cordeliers at Blois, where they must have been seen by the Countess of Penthievre. The occurrence of a similar badge upon the object before us therefore suggests that this sheath may itself have been made at some time of conspicuous bereavement, perhaps after the death of the Duke or the Count, for the *chantepleure* is not likely to have been selected at random at a period when its symbolic meaning was a matter of common knowledge. The melancholy motto *J'endure* accords very well with this supposition.

The sheath is an excellent specimen of the incised leather-work so popular in Italy and other countries in the Middle Ages. It is not quite equal to the example in the Bargello at Florence,^b for in that case the ornamentation is of equal excellence on both sides, whereas in the present instance only one side is fine, the other bearing geometrical ornament of inferior quality. This inferior surface was evidently worn next the esquire's side, and it was not thought worth while to waste too much labour upon its embellishment.

A few notes may be subjoined as to the purpose for which such knives were made and the manner in which they were used. In his *État du Duc*, Olivier de la Marche, of the household of the Duke of Burgundy, describes the duties of the *écuyers tranchants* or esquire carvers in the year 1474;^c and although this period is almost a century later than that to which our knives belong, the usages of the

^a C. Paradin, *Devises héroïques* (Lyons, 1557), 91. For the circumstances connected with the murder of the Duke of Orleans see Barante, *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne*, ii. 419.

^b Reproduced by G. Sangiorgi, *La Collection Carrand au Bargello* (1895), pl. 82; but better by Victor Gay, *Glossaire archéologique*, 481. It has the Annunciation and an armorial device on backgrounds of fine floral scrolls.

^c V. Gay, *Glossaire archéologique*, s.v. *Couteau*.

ducal household had probably undergone but little change. We have to imagine the duke seated at a table facing down the hall, and approached from the opposite side by those who performed the service. The annexed figure (Fig. 3) from the famous "Hours of the Duc de Berri," painted at the beginning of the fifteenth century,^a and therefore almost contemporaneous with our knives, shows the uncle of Charles VI. dining in state with his chamberlain and esquires in attendance. In the foreground stands an esquire carver holding in his hand a knife of the same form as ours.^b Amongst the plate on the left side of the picture we may remark a covered vessel not dissimilar from the famous gold cup presented by this very prince to his nephew, and now a principal treasure of the Gold Ornament Room in the British Museum.

Fig. 3. The Duc de Berri at dinner: carvers in the foreground.

(From the reproduction in *Le Musée Condé: Manuscrits*.
Paris, 1900.)

The illustration sufficiently explains the description given by Olivier de la Marche, for the dinner of a Duc de Berri probably differed in little from that of a Duc de Bourgogne. The *écuyer tranchant*, he says, placed his two large carving knives upon the table with their blades pointing towards his master, but covered by a white cloth. The small knife which accompanied them was laid beyond them with its handle towards and within reach of the duke, for whose personal use it was intended. At the appointed time the esquire advanced to the table directly opposite the duke, and there carved the meat with his two large knives. He used one to cut, the other to support and carry, transferring with it the slices from the joint to the plate or trencher. This was a process requiring some dexterity, and its acquisition formed part of an esquire's education down to about the middle of the sixteenth century, when the introduction of forks rendered the carver's task less difficult. Our two larger knives are such a pair, and were

^a In the Musée Condé at Chantilly. See *Le Musée Condé: Le Cabinet des Livres: Manuscrits* (Paris, 1900), i. 64.

^b This was the usual form of carving-knives: in fact it is much the same as the form still preferred in France.

therefore employed not by the duke but by his carvers. The small knives, though kept in the same leather case and also consigned to the esquire's care, were in all probability used by the duke to cut up his meat and bread. One of them may perhaps be a *parepain*, a smaller instrument than the *taillepain*,^a or large bread-knife with which the servant cut the lord's bread into slices for the trencher, though we are told that the *parepain* was often kept in a separate sheath.

Though Olivier de la Marche only mentions one small knife, and the case in the Museum of Le Mans has only room for one such, the early inventories clearly speak of two as a common number,^b and the set belonging to John the Intrepid is thus by no means abnormal. The entries in the inventories seem to show that the sets of knives were not always uniform, but that the grouping of the different kinds in the cases occasionally varied.

Those who are curious in the matter of carving in ancient times may with advantage consult the early inventories, and the *Bokes of Nurture and Kervynge*, edited by Dr. Furnivall for the Roxburgh Club.^c A number of interesting details are also to be found in Victor Gay's *Glossaire archéologique*, s.v. *Couteau*; also in the second volume of Viollet le Duc's *Dictionnaire du Mobilier* under the same word. Among other facts there mentioned is the custom in princely houses of using knives with handles of different materials and colours at different seasons of the ecclesiastical year: thus ebony handles were favoured in Lent and those of ivory at Easter. The materials used for handles were very various: crystal, amber, and woods of different kinds being all employed in addition to chased, nielloed, or enamelled metal. The Carrand Collection in the Bargello at Florence^d contains fine examples of such medieval knives, one of which has been mentioned earlier in this paper. A set in the Opera del Duomo at Siena has nielloed ornament on silver upon the handles, and still preserves its *cuir-bouilli* sheath. Medieval knives of fine quality have been exhibited at various times before English archaeological societies.^e

^a Another large bread knife was the *chablepain*, which appears to have somewhat resembled the broad-bladed *présentoir* used for clearing up crumbs and for serving fish or pastry to the guests. Examples of the *présentoir* may be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Salting Collection), in the Bargello, the Louvre, and other museums.

^b Inventory of A.D. 1458: a case for "*quatre couteaulx à servir le roy nostre Seigneur à table. Quatre paires de couteaux à tailler sur la table, garnis de quatre paires de parepains.*" (Laborde, *Inventaires des ducs de Bourgogne*, No. 1192.) In an inventory of A.D. 1368 we read the following: *Payé à Thomas de Erevillier, coustellier, demourant à Paris, 12 fr. pour une paire de cousteaux de table avec le taillepain, le petit coustel et les guainnes* (B. Prost, *Inventaires mobiliers . . . des Ducs de Bourgogne*, vol. i. p. 166, Paris, 1902).

^c Published in 1866. See also the references given in the *Archæological Journal*, xxvii. 78.

^d See the *Catalogo del R. Museo Nazionale di Firenze*, Nos. 855 ff. pp. 156-7.

^e *Archæological Journal*, ix. 120 (three knives in a case); *Proceedings*, 2nd Series, xvii. 9.