THE GUILDHALL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM.¹

EARLY five centuries ago, and a quarter of a century after the death of the poet Chaucer, the Guildhall Library found its first home, through the liberality of Sir Richard Whittington and William Bury, on a site adjoining the chapel of St. Mary Magdalen and All Saints at the Guildhall.

Of William Bury, one of the founders, nothing is known beyond the statement of Stow that his initials W. and B. appeared in the stonework on one side of the library. Of his more famous colleague, Sir Richard Whittington, it may be truly said that his praise is in every mouth. He is the one Lord Mayor who has been exalted to the dignity of a nursery hero. That he was a man of the highest culture is proved by his foundation of this library and of the sister library at the Greyfriars, afterwards Christ's Hospital.

Whittington is fittingly commemorated in the large window at the east end of the Guildhall Library, and in the Museum we have a still more interesting record of him, a small sculptured stone bequeathed to the Corporation by Canon Lysons, his biographer. It represents this City worthy as a

¹ The substance of a lecture delivered in December, 1902.

boy holding a cat, thus giving some support to the nursery legend. The stone was found in Gloucestershire, near Whittington's house, and its early date suggests that the legend was believed, if not in his lifetime, at all events soon after his death.

One other curious picture of Whittington has come down to us. This is an illustration in the ordinances of Whittington's college for five chaplains and thirteen poor men, which he committed to the care of the Company of Mercers. Whittington is represented on his deathbed surrounded by his executors, a physician, a priest, and twelve of the poor almsmen. Alderman John Coventry stands by the bedside at the head, and next him the shorter figure of John Carpenter, the famous Common Clerk, compiler of 'Liber Albus' and founder of the City of London School. John Carpenter not only carried out the testamentary provisions of his friend Sir Richard Whittington, but, by his own will, left at the discretion of his executors any good or rare books which 'may seem necessary to the Common Library at Guildhall for the profit of the students there, and those discoursing to the common people,' directing that such books should be chained in the library, that the visitors and students thereof may be the sooner admonished to pray for his soul.

The library thus established was a separate building of two floors, and was attached to the collegiate chapel of St. Mary at the Guildhall, one of the four priests of which acted as keeper of the library.

The earliest librarian of whom any record exists was John Clipstone, priest, who presented a quaint

petition to the Court of Aldermen on the 14th July, 1444, setting forth the great attendance and charge which he hath with the library, and praying to be assured of his 'lyflode, housyng and easement of the gardyn, which he hath for that occupation atte this day, that he be not hereafter put away therefrom, ne noo part thereof.' After weighing the great diligence and merits of the petitioner, the Court favourably considered his request. He died in 1457, and was buried in the Guildhall Chapel.

The library attracted many other gifts, and had a flourishing existence for 125 years, when it fell a prey to the rapacity of the notorious Duke of Somerset, uncle to King Edward VI. Stow relates that the books were sent for by this nobleman, with a promise that they should be restored shortly, but they were never returned. Shortly afterwards the building was granted on lease to Sir John Ayleph, the keeper of Blackwell Hall, to be used as a common market house for the sale of cloth.

The site of Guildhall Chapel is shown on John Ogilby's map of 1677; it does not appear to have suffered much from the Great Fire. The old library may have been situated immediately behind, and to the east of the chapel which Blackwell Hall adjoined on the south. The Chapel survived as the Court of Requests until the early part of the last century, but the library was in all likelihood demolished not long after its disestablishment in 1550. It was probably fitted up on the stall system, of which the contemporary library of Merton College, Oxford, affords so interesting an example.

It is quite possible that the priests of the Guild-

hall College, especially the Keeper of the Library, employed themselves in multiplying copies of manuscripts, and that a Scriptorium existed at the Guildhall. Of the books which this old library possessed, no certain information exists. Those mentioned in Carpenter's will were almost entirely of a religious and moral character.

The first Guildhall Library, had it continued its existence to the present day, would have been not only the oldest, but probably the richest and most extensive in this country. The Bodleian Library dates its new foundation only from the year 1602, whilst our great national collection at the British Museum was not established for a century and a half still later.

Of the priceless manuscripts and early printed books contained in this library, which had a flourishing existence for a century and a quarter, not one volume is known to be preserved, nor even a catalogue which might give a clue to a successful search; but since honest John Clipstone and his priestly successors doubtless took care to inscribe every volume with the name of the library, there is room for hope that some may yet be discovered, possibly among the manuscript stores of some other library.

From the year 1550 to 1824 is a very long step, but it was not until the latter year that the Corporation took measures to re-establish their library. The second founder was Mr. Richard Lambert Jones, an eminent citizen in his day, upon whose motion the Court of Common Council appointed a special committee to establish a library in the

Guildhall to contain all matters relating to the City of London, Borough of Southwark, and the County of Middlesex. A permanent library committee was subsequently appointed of which Mr. R. L. Jones became chairman, and he continued to hold that position until his death in 1842.

The new library did not start under such favourable auspices as its predecessor; no wealthy citizen came forward to follow Lord Mayor Whittington's example in building a 'fayre and large' house for its reception, no bequests of choice books aided its foundation, nor was its purpose that of serving the wants of students and the common people. It was in fact a departmental library stored with City lore for the use of the Corporation and its officers. For its home, obscure and unsuitable apartments were provided in the east wing of the Guildhall front, and these were approached by a dark and narrow staircase. Little wonder that a library so founded, little known and little used, pursued for many years an uneventful career. There were, however, some points in its favour. The condition of the book market was then favourable for the procural of old and scarce London books, private collectors being fewer than at present, and our American rivals not being then in the field.

The committee under their able chairman took full advantage of these opportunities, with the result that the basis was laid for a library of London literature, including manuscripts, printed books, maps, prints, and drawings, which cannot now be equalled in richness or extent. Among the earliest acquisitions was a complete set of the

'London Gazette' from its commencement in 1665. In 1843 the autograph signature of Shakespeare, attached to the purchase-deed of a house in Blackfriars, dated 10th March, 1612, was bought at a sale in Messrs. Evans' rooms in Pall Mall for £145. This was secured for the library in the first instance by the chairman, Mr. Jones, on his personal responsibility, the purchase being afterwards confirmed by the Court of Common Council. The mortgage deed of the same property, also bearing Shakespeare's signature, and dated the following day, was purchased by the British Museum in 1858 for £315. About this time another treasure was secured in the almost unique copy of Agas's Map of London in the time of Elizabeth.

The first librarian was Mr. William Upcott, whose services were engaged to arrange and catalogue the library. On the opening of the library apartments for use in 1828, Mr. William Herbert, the London historian, was appointed librarian, and he was succeeded in 1845 by Mr. William Turner Alchin. Mr. Alchin has left a monument of his skill and industry as a palaeographer in the splendid series of indexes to the records of the Corporation preserved in the custody of the Town Clerk. His work for the library was no less noteworthy.

In 1847 Mr. Philip Salomons presented a valuable collection of about four hundred Hebrew books. This was supplemented by a portion of the munificent bequest in 1873 left by his brother Alderman Sir David Salomons, Bart., which was devoted to the acquisition of books illustrating the history of the Jews in all countries. An excellent catalogue of

74 THE GUILDHALL LIBRARY

these Hebraica and Judaica has been prepared by the Rev. Dr. Löwy.

In 1828, soon after the establishment of the library, a beginning was made for the collection of a civic museum. One of the earliest objects secured of the Roman period was the well-known group of the *Deae Matres*, which was found in Crutched Friars: the upper portion of these figures is unfortunately wanting. The fine stone monument erected by Anencletus to his wife Martina came from Ludgate Hill. Other additions were acquired from the discoveries made in the foundations of the General Post Office, New London Bridge, and the Guildhall Chapel. From the London Bridge improvements came the sign of the famous Shakespearian tavern, the Boar's Head in Eastcheap, which stood on the site of King William IV.'s statue.

Mr. Alchin died in 1865, and was succeeded in the office of librarian by my immediate predecessor, Mr. W. H. Overall. Four years later, in 1869, the Court of Common Council decided, upon the motion of the late Dr. Sedgwick Saunders, to build for the Guildhall Library and Museum a home more worthy of their value and importance. The contrast afforded by the two buildings will be appreciated when it is said that the site of the old library of 1824 occupied only the narrow passage from the Guildhall porch, lying between the wall of the Guildhall and the present Art Gallery—the site, in fact, of the corridor leading to the new library.

The step so boldly taken by the Corporation was fully justified by its success. The old apartments, which would barely accommodate at one

time twenty-five readers, who were admitted by ticket, gave place to the present library and museum designed by the late Sir Horace Jones, and seating more than one hundred and fifty readers, which was erected at an expense to the Corporation of £25,000. No portion of this substantial sum, or of the charges for annual maintenance and purchase of books, has ever fallen upon the City ratepayers. Admission to the library, newspaper-room, and museum was made free without any ticket or recommendation of any kind, and the yearly attendance of readers and visitors rose at once from 14,316 in 1868, the last year of the old library, to 192,716 in 1875, the first complete year of the new. It would be pleasant to describe some of the features of interest in the new library, its increased staff, extended hours of opening, card catalogues, appliances and methods of administration; but the remaining space at my disposal must be devoted to a mention of a few of its notable possessions, acquired by gift and purchase.

Both the library and the museum are rich in illustrations of the history of London. The beautiful French manuscript known as the '*Chronica Franciae*' belongs to the year 1399; among its many other fine miniatures, one represents the coronation of Charlemagne. Stow, the London historian, who largely used its pages, speaks of it as the 'great French book.' From the reign of Elizabeth we have in the library the '*Liber Fleetwood*,' a manuscript compilation of City Law made by William Fleetwood, the Recorder of

76 THE GUILDHALL LIBRARY

London. It is notable for its beautiful specimens of heraldic art, representing the arms of the aldermen who were Fleetwood's contemporaries. Among them is the coat of Sir Edward Osborn, ancestor of the Duke of Leeds, and hero of the famous leap from Old London Bridge. To the same reign belong the account of the Queen's progress through the City from the Tower to Westminster for her Coronation, and the earliest mayoralty pageant in the library, that of William Webb, Lord Mayor in 1591. This was composed by George Peele, the dramatist. Of later pageants of this kind I may mention that of Sir Thomas Middleton, Lord Mayor in 1613, written by his namesake, Thomas Middleton the dramatist, and the pageant of Sir John Leman, which is of especial interest, as the drawings of the different shows are preserved at Fishmongers' Hall, and were reproduced by that Company in a handsome folio volume, giving a full description of the pageant. Of course among the shows we find a lemon-tree, as a pun on the name of the mayor. Another page gives us a figure of Sir William Walworth, a noted member of the Fishmongers' Company, and another a fishing busse or boat, to represent the Company's craft.

Among seventeenth-century London books, some of which are very quaintly illustrated, we have 'The Bell-Man of London,' by Thomas Dekker, written in 1616; a curious description of the visit of Charles I. on his return from Scotland in 1641; Ogilby's account of Charles II.'s accession; the Bills of Mortality for 1665, with their ghastly story of the ravages of the Plague, when in one week

(September 12th-19th), 7,165 deaths were directly attributed to it; five folio manuscript volumes of Surveys, taken by Oliver and Mills, the City's surveyors, after the Great Fire of 1666; and (among the prints) Wren's plans for rebuilding the City, plans which, had they been adopted, would have saved the ratepayers some millions spent on widening the City thoroughfares; a little London Directory for 1677, which gives an object lesson in the vast increase of the metropolis when we compare it with the bulky volume now issued every year; Sandford's 'Account of the Coronation of James II.,' in one of the pictures of which the Lord Mayor's position in the ceremony at the Abbey is duly shown; illustrations of fairs held on the Thames during great frosts, and more miscellaneous treasures than I can name. I should mention, however, that it is with the year 1660 that there begins an interesting volume containing the arms and signatures of the Lord Mayors of London from that date down to the present day, that of Wilkes among the rest. Another relic connected with the office of Lord Mayor dates only from the mayoralty of Sir Reginald Hanson in 1887, the Sovereign's sign-manual to the notice of the daily pass-word at the Tower of London, which, by a custom not generally known, the Lord Mayor receives every quarter.

The last work connected with London which I shall mention is a unique copy of 'The Recreations of Zigzag,' by a well-known antiquary of the last century, John Wykeham Archer. It was originally published in parts, only a few of which

78 THE GUILDHALL LIBRARY

appeared, and this copy is made up of proofs and manuscript additions, with a specially printed title-page and many original drawings. The work deals in a delightful way with the author's rambles in the northern parts of London along the course of the river Fleet.

The museum like the library has been so enriched with the purchases and gifts of the past seventy-five years that it is impossible to give anything like a proper description, even by way of sample, of the treasures which it contains. These consist principally of two classes—those of the period of the Roman occupation, and those of a much later period, beginning with the sixteenth century. Some other objects in sparse quantity lie outside these periods, but it is a remarkable fact that the history of London, as exhibited in the museum, shows practically a blank of nearly one thousand years. Many of the arts which existed in their perfection in Roman times are met with in the early Tudor period in a rudimentary state. For instance, in the museum may be found decorated Samian ware and a mould for making it, gracefully shaped amphorae or wine jars, and examples of Roman glass of equally beautiful shape. Turning to the ceramic art of mediaeval London, we find the vessels characterized, not by their beauty, but by the grotesqueness and crudity of their design. The funeral customs of Roman London can be well illustrated. Many forms were in use. That of burial has left us the fine stone sarcophagus found at Clapton, with a bust of the deceased and an illegible description. A more

common custom was cremation, the charred bones being inclosed in an urn of glass or pottery. In the museum are two examples of glass urns (one of them nearly full of bones) found in Moorfields. There are also examples of a less usual practice, in which the cinerary urn was inclosed in the body of an amphora from which the neck and handles had been removed.

In the famous Roman gravel pit discovered on the site of the Royal Exchange, many fragile objects were found which have not been met with either at all or in the same numbers in other parts of the City. Among them was an interesting wooden writing tablet with its surface slightly hollowed for the wax on which the letter was written. The 'styli' or blunt pens with which the characters were formed are frequently found, both in metal and bone, on most Roman sites. The examples of Roman shoe leather in which the museum is so rich were chiefly obtained from the Royal Exchange. These may be compared with the extraordinary foot gear of early mediaeval London. Close by, in Bucklersbury, was found the beautiful Roman pavement which is our chief archaeological treasure. A group of objects, chiefly Roman, and so various as to form in themselves an epitome of the museum, were found under the National Safe Deposit Company's premises in Queen Victoria Street, and are shown in one case. From two bastions of London Wall came a large collection of Roman sculptured stones.

But I must now turn to mediaeval London, and may first mention an interesting class of objects

80 THE GUILDHALL LIBRARY

known as pilgrim signs, in which the museum is very rich. These religious symbols largely relate to London's early patron saint, Thomas of Canterbury, known during his lifetime as Thomas à Becket. The social habits of Londoners in former days are illustrated by a collection of leather black-jacks and costrels. At a later date the wine was fetched from the vintner's in stone bottles popularly known as Bellarmine or Grey Beards, some of which are elaborately decorated. They were in use for quite two hundred years. Drinking and smoking are naturally associated. The museum collection of tobacco pipes shows several interesting specimens with makers' marks, and the gradual evolution of the pipe, from the specimens with small bowls to some which closely resemble the churchwarden of the present day. The leather bottle, of which we have just mentioned some examples, has always been a favourite tavern sign. The museum has a specimen from the house at the corner of Leather Lane, Holborn. Another favourite sign, that of the Three Kings, was chiefly used by mercers, who obtained their thread from Cologne, where the Magi were said to have been buried. Of the Bull and Mouth Tavern, in St. Martin-le-Grand, we have two interesting signs, one from Endell Street, and the other from the front of the Queen's Hotel, which bears the curious inscription of Milo the 'Cretonian.' These are but samples of many more of their class to be found in the museum, and I would here put in a plea for the preservation of various other old signs now existing in London, which may, if not looked

after, fall into unsuitable hands instead of being preserved, as I venture to say they should be, in the Guildhall Museum.

The two famous figures of Raving and Melancholy Madness, which were formerly placed over the gateway of old Bedlam, were carved by Caius Gabriel Cibber, who also executed the allegorical sculpture on the Monument. This is now so weather-beaten as to be hardly distinguishable, and the details afforded by a contemporary print show the value of a collection of engravings for enshrining the memory of the past in a manner more durable than the stone itself.

Lastly, I would mention that among the collections in the museum is one comprising the various badges and medals worn by the Masters, Wardens and other officials of the City Livery Companies. Most of these valuable and interesting objects have been presented by the Companies themselves. Thus we have a complete set of their medals presented by the Farriers' Company.

Having thus roughly indicated some of the individual objects in the library and museum which illustrate the history of the City of London, I may mention a few of the special collections which the library contains. My remarks must, I fear, be limited to a simple enumeration of them. The library of the Dutch Protestant Church in Austin Friars was deposited here when the church was burnt some forty years since. The Clockmakers' Company have deposited not only their valuable library, but also their horological specimens, mostly made by members of the company. The Gardeners'

Company have presented and maintain a collection of books on their delightful art, and the Cooks' Company and a few other guilds have followed the same liberal course. The series of London maps, prints and drawings has been already mentioned. Among other rarities is the fine view of London by Hollar, taken in 1646, before the Great Fire, which shows the houses of the nobility on the south side of the Strand, while towering above and beyond are seen the northern heights of London. There is also a large gathering of the ancient records of the City wards and parishes invaluable to the student of London history, for which the library is largely indebted to the untiring zeal of Mr. Deputy White. Minute books of old London clubs have also been presented, among others those of the Court of Equity, which held its meetings at La Belle Sauvage Inn. The Alfred Cock collection of the works of, and books relating to Sir Thomas More was presented by public subscription.

Of notable acquisitions by purchase I can only mention a few. The fine English missal of the beginning of the fifteenth century once belonged to the church of St. Botolph, Aldersgate. A very elaborate copy of Thomson's 'Chronicles of London Bridge,' inlaid, interleaved and illustrated, has extended that little duodecimo to a huge work in five great quarto volumes. Another Grangerized work is the beautiful copy of Lysons' 'Environs of London,' enriched with many water-colour drawings and old prints, and beautiful heraldic illuminations painted on the margin of the page. Clarke's 'Life of Nelson' is a book similarly treated with portraits,

finely executed, of Nelson's captains and other notable personages of the period. From the library of the late Major Alfred Heales many fine liturgical works and manuscripts were secured. One book of more modern date deserves special mention, the splendid pictorial representation of the coronation of George IV. in 1820.

It was my wish to have spoken upon the special information which the library can supply to various classes of students and others, but my space is nearly exhausted and I must substitute a cordial invitation to all those whom my remarks may reach to come and see for themselves. Admission to the library is entirely free on the simple condition of signing the visitors' book. The hours of opening are from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily, and till 6 o'clock on Saturdays. It is satisfactory to be able to say that the facilities thus offered are not neglected. Notwithstanding the multiplication of libraries in the great suburbs of London the taste for reading and research seems to grow with its exercise, and the number of real students who frequent the Guildhall Library is larger now than at any previous period.

I have reserved for the last the mention of a few notable gifts and bequests. From Pope Leo XIII. we received, through Cardinal Manning, a volume of special interest prepared as a gift to His Holiness by the staff of the Vatican Library. It has been honoured by the Library Committee with a special binding—an ancient design beautifully produced in gold upon vellum—which does credit to the binders to the library, by whom it was executed. Her late Majesty Queen Victoria presented an

84 THE GUILDHALL LIBRARY.

account of the Albert Memorial, with her autograph inscription. The recent bequest by Dr. Willshire of his library and collection of prints illustrating the history of the art of engraving is an accession of which any library might be proud.

The subject of desiderata is one to which many pages might be devoted ; but it may not be out of place to mention that the City of London does not contain a copy of the works of its eminent citizen Geoffrey Chaucer, either in the beautiful modern edition from the Kelmscott Press of William Morris, or, in their still choicer form, as printed by an eminent City apprentice, William Caxton. I know that Caxtons now fetch £10 a page, but I am not without hope that it may occur to some generous citizen ere long to supply so notable a gap in the City Library.

We have journeyed together through the history of the Guildhall Library for four hundred and seventy-seven years, and many of my readers will doubtless live to see the 500th anniversary of its first foundation celebrated in 1925. May I venture to prophesy that that year will find the library fully equipped for the great position which it must surely be destined to take of ministering to the wide and ever-increasing needs of every legitimate inquirer and earnest student, no matter what may be the object of his search ? The Corporation of this City have done their part nobly and well, it is for the citizens of the great metropolis to see to it that the library of the City of London shall be worthy in all respects of its distinguished function of ministering to the literary needs of the greatest city in the world.

CHARLES WELCH.