



Two Ancient Manuscripts.

SIR,—Some of your readers may be interested in knowing that there will shortly be sold at Messrs. Sotheby's Rooms in London two ancient MSS. closely associated, it is believed, with the authorities of Reading Abbey. The books belong to the representatives of the late Captain Thomas Breedon, of Pangbourne, and are being sold by order of the High Court of Justice.

The first is a large folio-vellum some five inches in thickness, comprising the second half of Wycliffe's translation of the Bible. It commences with the Parables (*i.e.* Proverbs) of Solomon and includes the whole of the remaining books of the Old Testament, the two books of Maccabees, and the whole of the New Testament. Each of the books of the sacred text is introduced by a prologue. The first letter of each book is always very large, extending frequently to the whole length of the page and beautifully illuminated in gold and colours. There are no sub-divisions into chapters, but the first letter of each of the paragraphs is also illuminated.

At the commencement of the volume there is a copious calendar of Saints and Holy Days, with their appropriate first and second Lessons, and these latter coincide to a large degree with the Lessons now in use in the Church. The Calendar and Lessons are according to the Sarum use, Berkshire being in Wycliffe's time and up to a few years ago part of the diocese of Salisbury, its Bishops having palaces at Sonning and Speen.

The original translation of Wycliffe's Bible in his own handwriting is now at St. John's College, Oxford, and is the choicest treasure in that Library.

Of the first edition of Wycliffe's Bible only eleven copies are known, and Mr. Quaritch has one priced in his current catalogue at £1,000. Later copies of the second edition are more numerous and, therefore, very much less valuable.

The copy for sale at Sotheby's was found at Bere Court under very singular circumstances. The Mansion House was the principal

summer residence of the Abbots of Reading. Some years ago, in the time of John Symonds Breendon, Esq., a portion of the floor of the small "withdrawing room" fell in and disclosed beneath, a room, supposed to have been a prayer cell, and which for many generations previously had been unknown. In this room or cell was found the copy of Wycliffe's Bible. It is in excellent condition, beautifully written, and is believed to be quite perfect, not a word being missing. The date of translation is, in all probability, about 1380. The binding, for its age, is in a good state, and is of the period of about 1420.

Looking at the circumstances under which the Bible was found, I think there is every reason for believing that the book must have belonged either to Reading Abbey itself or to one ranking high amongst the Abbey authorities.

The second Manuscript is a Book of Hours of the 14th century found also in the residence. The binding is gone, and the book has been badly mutilated, but the portions remaining are beautifully written, and there are several illuminations finely executed both in drawing and colour.

This letter has grown to a length that I had not anticipated, but I thought a description of these manuscripts, over 500 years old, would be interesting to Reading and Berkshire readers, especially, as, so far as I am aware, they are the only books associated directly with Reading Abbey.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN EGGINTON.

Reading, January 8th, 1890.

* *

562 HORÆ BEATÆ MARIE VIRGINIS, cum Calendario, MANUSCRIPT ON VELLUM, by *an English Scribe, ornamented with 17 bordered initial letters (the first historiated with a MINIATURE of the Circumcision) and numerous capitals, all finely illuminated in gold and colours, slightly imperfect.*—Sold for £34.

SÆC. XV.

* * In the Calendar of this valuable English Service Book, at end of each month, is added what thunder therein betokeneth and in the month of September is an entry of the obit of Sir Thomas Gedne Dominus de Norton in 1462. On the reverse of one of the leaves is an entry proving that in 6 Queen Elizabeth (1563) this manuscript belonged to Margaret

Fytzhugh Cust, daughter of Robert Fytzhugh and Elizabeth his wife, born at Wasenden (nunc Waddendon) in the County of Bucks, near Aylesbury. At the end is the following MS. note : "This Missal (Horæ), belonging to Bere Court Library, was found at the bottom of a drawer in the china closet by me John Symonds Breedon. It is supposed to have been in the house from the time of Hugh Farington Abbot of Reading." A former owner said it had belonged to Henry VIII., but this is doubtful.

- 297 BIBLE. SECOND PORTION OF WICLIF'S VERSION, extending from Proverbs to Revelations, both inclusive, with the two Books of Maccabees. The Calendar prefixed gives the Saints' Days, with First and Second Lessons according to the Sarum Use, and there is a Prologue to each of the different Books. SPLENDID MANUSCRIPT ON VELLUM (*quite perfect*) ornamented with 49 beautifully bordered initial letters, richly illuminated in gold and colours, oak boards covered in red velvet, with brass corners.—Sold to Mr. Qarritch for £120.

SÆC. XIV.

INVENTORY OF CHURCH PLATE.

Some progress has been made in this work. Mr. Dasent has collected information of the Sacramental Plate in all the parishes in the Forest of Windsor, 21 in number ; and Mr. Gardiner has discovered at Childrey a Pre-Reformation Paten, and also one at Challow, which may possibly belong to the same period.

The following letter has been received by the Secretary from the Lord Bishop of Oxford :—

"Cuddesdon, March 1st, 1890.

I most heartily sympathize with and sanction your plan of making a list of the Church Plate in the Diocese, and hope that all the clergy will help, so that it may be complete. We ought to be much obliged to Mr. Gardiner and Mr. Dasent for the trouble they will have to take in the matter ; but the interest is great and remunerative.

W. OXON."