

NOTES ON A SILVER-MOUNTED PRAYER BOOK IN LINCOLN'S INN LIBRARY.

BY

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AMONG the treasures of Lincoln's Inn Library, there is a large folio volume which appeals strongly to most visitors. It is a copy of "The Booke of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments," published in 1634. Bound up with it is "The Whole Booke of Psalmes by Th. Sternhold, John Hopkins and others," published in 1632. The "Black Books" of the Inn tell us it was bought in 1634 for the sum of £8 11s.

As a specimen of the printing of the period, on a peculiar thin and tough paper not unlike modern "India" paper, the book is worth inspection. Its silver ornamented binding is, however, its chief attraction. The black morocco cover, nearly as sound as when it left the binder's hands, is adorned with eight large silver mounts engraved with half length figures of SS. Bartholomew, James, Mathias and Thomas on the front cover, and SS. Philip, Jacobus Minor, Andrew and Peter on the back cover. In the centre on each side is a large oval mount engraved with the arms of Henry Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, and an Earl's coronet. The clasps have small full length figures of the four Evangelists, with their emblems. Until a few years ago the volume did not form part of the Library but was in custody of the Butler, who, however, it is interesting to recall, was in early times the Society's Librarian. He, not unnaturally, kept it amongst the plate and catalogued it in the plate-books. Now it reposes in a handsome glass case at the foot of the statue of Lord Erskine.



SILVER-MOUNTED PRAYER-BOOK, 1634, AT LINCOLN'S INN.

From a very slight examination it is apparent that the arms of the Earl of Lincoln are not part of the original silver mounts, but are superimposed on the original centre mounts, a fact which has given rise to speculation as to whether or not they may have been cut from some article of plate that actually belonged to the traditionary founder of Lincoln's Inn, forming in this case an interesting link in the history of the Inn. The Earl died at Lincoln's Inn in 1311 and the first volume of the "Black Books," as the existing Records of the Society are called, dating from 1422, is headed *Liber Hospicii de Lincolsin*.

I cannot, of course, discuss here the various theories as to the origin of Lincoln's Inn, which have been advanced within recent years, but the centuries-old tradition alluded to by Stow and Dugdale that the Earl of Lincoln, between 1286 and 1310, built his inn in Holborn and brought the professors of the law to settle there, from which fact is derived the title of Lincoln's Inn, although challenged has never been disproved.

The arms of the Inn, verified a few years ago at Heralds' College are "Azure semé de fers de mouline or, on a canton of the second, a lion rampant purple." This coat of arms dates back over three hundred years during which time however the arms of the Earl of Lincoln, the lion rampant, have also been occasionally used by the Society and are still displayed in the Inn. But, with the exception of the Prayer Book, which is the subject of this note, the Earl's coronet has never been used at Lincoln's Inn—the old Benchers were probably too well versed in heraldry to make such a mistake.

It seems quite possible, however, that, when the Prayer Book was bought just 290 years ago, the Society possessed some articles of plate formerly belonging to the Earl and that they decided as a graceful and commemorative act to cut from these the arms of their founder and place them on the Prayer Book used every Sunday in the Chapel. Slight confirmatory evidence may be found in the thickness of the

plate which unlike that of the corner-mounts approaches an eighth of an inch.

This, I venture to submit, although it cannot be proved, is a more reasonable assumption than to think that the Earl's arms and coronet were placed on the Prayer Book more or less accidentally and without thought.