



The Berks, Bucks & Oxon Archæological Journal.

Gossip of an Antiquary.

I was minding to write concerning the Coronation of our King, but His Majesty's grievous illness has plunged the nation into a flood of grief, and the sounds of rejoicing have died away into silence. One thought is in our hearts, one prayer is on the lips—God save the King.

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At such times the tongue of gossip is still, and the pen of the scribe refuses to write, save only concerning the one all-important subject which every one from the highest to the lowest is discussing at this moment with bated breath and whispered anxiety. The Editor therefore gives me leave to abbreviate my paragraphs, and to withhold what I have to say until a more convenient season.

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There is, however, one subject which cannot be passed in silence, and that is the approaching Ter-centenary of the foundation of the Bodleian Library, which will be commemorated in October next. The University of Oxford has conferred upon the Rev. W. D. Macray the well merited degree of Doctor of Letters in anticipation of the event, and upon Mr. George Parker, senior assistant librarian, the degree of Hon. M.A. Both these distinctions have been well earned by many years of devoted labour in the cause of learning, and in the promotion of the welfare of the Bodleian Library.

The University Library at Oxford was founded in the time of the Second Edward in the N.E. corner of St. Mary's Church, by Roger de Lisle, Dean of York, and in 1320 Bishop Cobham of Worcester presented his collection of books. Henry IV. was a great patron, endowing it with half-a-mark a year, and with £5 from the assize of bread and ale. The University began to build that portion of the buildings now known as the Divinity School in 1426. Then the authorities approached Duke Humphrey and asked his aid, offering to give him the title of founder. The Duke was agreeable, and the building was commenced in 1445 and finished in 1480, forming the central portion of the great Reading Room.

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The Library grew, but then came the iniquitous visitors of Edward VI., who were ordered to search out and confiscate all MSS. having traces of Romanism, either in illumination or rubricated initials. Never was such vandalism committed. The valuable gatherings of years were burnt and sold, and the famous Duke Humphrey's Library became a timber-yard. Then came the restoration and re-building of Sir Thomas Bodley, whose name Oxford will ever honour. Wearied with court-life and disgusted with public affairs, he determined "to set up my staff at the Library-door in Oxon, being thoroughly persuaded that, in by solitude and surcease from the commonwealth affairs, I could not bury myself to better purpose than by reducing the place to the public use of students." Nobly he did his work, and all students, and especially Oxford men, have reason to bless the name of Thomas Bodley, and to unite in honouring his memory.

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I am sorry to hear of the death of General Vachell, the last of the Junior Branch of that family, which was so closely connected with Reading in former days. The annals of this family were told in the pages of the Berks Archæological Journal, the predecessor of this Magazine. Major-General Henry Tanfield Vachell died at Brighton a few weeks ago. He served with the Bombay Artillery in the Persian Campaign of 1857, and during the Mutiny at the capture of Sholapore and the surrender of Jumnundee.

