

SEVERAL GREAT LIBRARIES.

BY JAMES FROTHINGHAM HUNNEWELL.

Note.—Descriptions of these eighteen libraries, except Althorp, are from notes made by the writer during his visits to them; and several of them he has more than once visited.

A VISIT, either with bodily or mental eye, to a dozen and a half notable libraries, gives us not only pleasure when we go or when we remember, but also, while all but one of them are foreign, great comfort and satisfaction when we reach, or think of, the last, which is American.

The installation of these libraries, quite as well as their character and history, is of marked interest in the survey. It is just there, indeed, that we find not a little of our final satisfaction. How a library is installed, or housed, affects a great deal our estimate of the consideration in which it is held, as well as our enjoyment of beauty and fitness. If fine feathers make fine birds, fine buildings or rooms at least help to make fine libraries.

As it was with many a modern state, so it was with the modern notable libraries. Far back in the Middle Ages grew the rudiments. Royal and noble collectors, not many, there were, but it was in the repose, the beauty, or the grandeur of the monasteries—the nurseries or shelters of civilization—that they chiefly originated and developed. It was there also early and late shown that the value of preservation is no less than the value of gathering.

In a way natural to us, we begin our observations in the home-land of our race. There, three centuries and a half have passed since the Dissolution, when by scores, *scriptorium* and *bibliotheca*, along with church and cloister, were given over to ruin or transformation, so that now we

must almost search for examples that seem still to preserve their old life and character.

A great majority of the English Monasteries now present only ruins, often, even yet, stately or beautiful. Of some, the churches have become cathedrals, and a few of these retain portions of the edifices attached, and a lesser number have libraries. *Lincoln* has one side of the cloisters replaced by an incongruous, ugly Italianish structure, built by Sir Christopher Wren for a library, for notes on which one can consult Dr. Dibdin. *Chester* has its Early English chapter house well placed beside its cloisters, in shape almost a double square, and now the library, charmingly picturesque and remarkably comfortable. Still, it is a modern adaptation.

At *Durham*, however, is a noble library in the old monastic buildings themselves. To be sure it is developed from the dormitory and another hall, but, as already said; it is a part, and a noble part, of the ancient structure, and it has several thousand printed books and as many hundred manuscripts "descended from the monastery to the chapter." Mr. Billings says it is "certainly superior to any ecclesiastical library in the country," and Mr. King considers it "one of the most interesting and important." The whole great group of Cathedral, Monastic buildings, and Castle at Durham, enthroned upon their high, bold hill, is one of the glories of the Middle Ages, and their preservation and superb enrichment are among the glories both of England and of modern piety and civilization.

The representative library with old religious associations that is mentioned here, is, however, one on a much smaller scale, but that yet seems to be in its primæval home. It is said to date, as a collection, only from 1686, but it is uncommonly old in effect, it is thoroughly old English, and much pleased the writer's fancy.

In eastern Dorsetshire, some half-a-dozen miles from the Channel Coast, is a long, straggling town, *Wimborne*,

seat of an ancient monastic institution now represented by the *Minster*. Among the thatched or red brick houses it still rises prominent, although it is not high, surrounded by verdant grounds, cruciform, built of irregular brownish or grayish stones, with a square tower at the centre and another at the west end. Within, are Norman and Early Pointed work covered by dark timber roofs. At the south side of the choir there is a vestry resembling a chapter house, and adjoining is a small turnpike stair that leads to a library overhead. It is a moderate-sized, quaint room, with little windows and a nearly flat-beamed ceiling. On all sides of it are shelves with books, most of them large, and secured to the shelves by long chains, in an old style scarcely shown elsewhere. In monastic style, also, the backs are usually turned inward. Here the writer found a man worthy of the place, and of cordial regard by all lovers of books. He was a little gray-haired sexton, half a century in office, who had found the books—long ago left to be a parish library—dusty, dirty, torn, and disordered; not the only library of the sort that has fared in this way. He had mended them, arranged them, and kept them clean—peace to his good old soul! Here, in a quiet English country town was a survival, suggestive, at least, of an old monastic library in a quaint, harmonious mediæval room, still kept with loving care. The literature was old, dry, perhaps, as were the volumes, but yet worth saving, and in a way worth imitation in greater places.

When nearly all the monastic libraries had been dispersed from their ancient homes, other collections were formed, like many of them, in retired and beautiful rural places. The *Country Seat* succeeded the Monastery as the home of libraries, and of those that were still larger and more valuable. Of varied size, or interest, or importance they were scattered in great number throughout the land, and now, in turn, they are in our time, to a large extent, becoming also dispersed.

One of the grandest and most precious of all of them, lodged in the stateliest style, was the *Sunderland* at *Blenheim*. This seat, as is well known, one of the most magnificent in England, is about eight miles from Oxford, and was built between 1705 and 1715 as a national tribute and memorial to the great Duke of Marlborough for his immense services to his country, services that not only gave it great victories and increased power, but that saved Europe from French despotism. In this edifice, 850 feet long and covering seven acres, was an apartment intended for a picture gallery, 183 feet long, besides projections, finished in Doric style. This made the library, and was lined by cases with latticed fronts. In these were placed the wonderful collection made by Charles, third Earl of Sunderland, in the course of a dozen years, during the reigns of George I. and II., and sold between December, 1881, and March, 1883. There were some 17,000 volumes, that brought £56,581 6s. The number of early printed Bibles, classics, works of great Italian authors, and books on vellum was amazing. Nor were these all. Americana, Law, English County Histories, Poets, and Historical Pamphlets were represented in profusion, as were also historic bindings. It was a library worthy of a great lord, of a great palace, of even a nation. Seen as it was in its grand home, it was a noble sight, such as we can hardly view again.

Another notable departure of a great family library—perhaps the most precious of the sort in the world—was that from *Althorp Park*, Northamptonshire, for over three centuries the residence of the family of George John, Earl Spencer. It was chiefly formed by him in the course of twenty-four years following 1784, and contained nearly 50,000 volumes, all of great rarity and value, and comprising examples of early printing amazing in number. This, perhaps unique collection, although transferred, has been kept intact. Whether its preservation will be as

secure in the future as in the past, remains to be proved.

While a majority of the great family libraries in England have, during recent years, been dispersed, there are, happily, others that remain in their home quarters.

At *Eaton Hall*, near Chester, seat of the Duke of Westminster, is a magnificent example. This residence through most of the present century was a large and stately edifice, in English pointed style, but in recent years it has been almost rebuilt with even greater magnificence. The library is a very large and noble room, elaborately finished, the wood-work American black walnut, the cases open and containing an extensive collection of fine books on a great variety of subjects.

At *Alnwick Castle*, seat of the Duke of Northumberland, is an even richer example. The huge brown castle is feudal in history as well as style, with apartments superbly refitted since 1854. The library, T-shaped, is 72 feet long, finished with light oak inlaid with a lighter, covered with fine scroll-work and highly polished throughout. There are three white marble fireplaces. In the cases are 16,000 volumes, useful, valuable and handsomely bound. Conspicuously placed among them, I saw the Massachusetts Records, New York State Reports, and the Pacific Rail Road Survey.

An example of not only a family library, but also of creation and use by a great author; is that of Sir Walter Scott at *Abbotsford*—perhaps it is safe to say, the most magnificent of its sort in the world. Its formation was the work of his lifetime, from youth to close. Not only is it a monument of his amazing literary activity, knowledge and power; it is as well a monument of the honor of a gentleman, for when that had inspired him to gigantic struggle to protect his commercial credit after a failure not caused by him, his creditors freed it and restored it to him as "the best means" they had "of expressing their very high sense of his most honorable conduct." Few groups of creditors

ever had opportunity to honor themselves as they did by that act.

As pretty much all the world knows, Sir Walter created Abbotsford between 1812 and 1824. The house left by him measures about 150 by 50 feet, and on a side overlooking the Tweed is the library, 40 feet long, 19 wide, and about 15 high. Its ceiling is divided into squares by crossed beams that at the sides spring from decorated corbels. At the intersections are pendants with "Stars of Bethlehem," copied from originals at Rosslyn. All parts are in stucco, painted to imitate oak, perhaps the only material practicable there. The upper portion of the wall is painted in imitation of green drapery. Around the room are twenty-five high oak cases, having doors latticed with brass wire. On the shelves are several thousand volumes, arranged by subjects. The collection of early prose fiction and poetry, and that relating to the insurrections of 1715 and 1745, are remarkable; that on Magic and Witchcraft has been thought to be the most wonderful ever formed. Hardly less so, is the array of presentation copies; few authors in Scott's time are unrepresented, and probably not a dialect in Europe. More precious yet, are the profuse notes that Scott himself wrote in a very great number of volumes, so that perusal of them would be like conversation with him on an immense variety of subjects.

It was a desire of Scott, with the instincts of his race and country, to found a family with a family seat, and part of the heirloom was this library, one such as hardly an author has ever created, and, furthermore, a memorial of the author, who, of our tongue, followed closest after Shakespeare. Vicissitudes of family libraries are sometimes strange or painful. Of the founder of this, children, including heir of his title, passed away, sore commercial peril was early encountered, and risks of mortal affairs ensued, but still in the cherished home of its illustrious

creator it remains safe and treasured with the Honorable Mary Monica Maxwell-Scott.

Another library once private remains famous, especially in our day; not one of an author great in literature, but great in historic events shaped by him.

The *Columbina* at Seville has less of personal or of architectural interest, for it shows less art than is usual in Spain. Time and contingencies have affected it; pests of entomology and of anthropology have beset it. The original, say 20,000 volumes, are reduced, it is said, to 10,000.

The Church, through its many officers and organizations, formed and controlled on the Continent of Europe a great number of libraries, many of which have been dispersed, others of which remain. Among these, we turn to the one preëminent.

The *Vatican Library* may be said to date from Nicholas V., in 1447, when, of course, it was manuscript. Developed after 1480, it was lodged as at present about 1588, and from that time attained its still existing celebrity as one of the most precious ever in the world. Through the past three centuries this richness has constantly increased, chiefly in manuscripts, of which there are probably 24,000, a collection surpassing all others. The number of printed books, though large, is far less than in the great National Libraries.

The installation is worthy of the treasures. In a square vestibule with marble walls, a coved ceiling and cases of fine cabinet work, visitors are at the end of galleries—halls with arched ceilings, comparatively narrow—extending over a thousand feet, enriched with frescos and porphyry or other superb columns, and lined by closed cases—for the priceless contents are for preservation and judicious use, and not for show.

At the left is the Grand Hall, 220 feet long. Through its centre is a row of square piers, bearing two ranges of

low-curved arches. All surfaces are finely painted; on the walls are shown historical subjects, on the piers full-length figures, on the vaults ornament on light grounds. Here, also, and about five feet high, are closed wooden cases, on which are painted flowers. Throughout the hall is a great array of presents, gorgeous vases of porcelain, porphyry, or malachite, statuary, and other art-works. In horizontal glazed cases are shown some of the marvels of the Vatican—and of the world. There is the Codex Vaticanus, clear, in fine order, its exposed leaves covered with celluloid. Elsewhere are autograph texts by Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, Henry VIII., and others, and volumes with 4,000,000 signatures, from all over the world, sent to Pius IX. Still further is an amazing display of elaborate sixteenth century bindings. All ways considered, the Vatican Library is now, and probably always will be, without a like elsewhere.

The beauty and magnificence of other Italian libraries belonging to the Church or State, tempt to mention and description of several. But passing the glory of the Benedictines at Monte Cassano, and the Magliabecchi at Florence, we turn briefly to the superb *Sala Piccolominea* at Sienna. It is a spacious oblong hall, bright and elegant, as well as cheerful, built in 1495. Around the upper part of the walls are large pilasters, bearing lofty arches, from which springs a coved ceiling. Framed by pilasters and arches, and added between 1502 and 1506, are ten very large and remarkably well preserved historical frescos, light in tone, by Pinturicchio, who is said to have been assisted by Raphael. All other upper parts are covered with elaborate decoration, also painted. Displayed in dark carved wood cases along the hall, the writer counted sixty-six choir books, on vellum, superbly illuminated. In delicacy of designs, the great diffusion of color, and artistic merit, this hall is one of revelations of the Renaissance. In it, books that are works of art are quite at home.

In what may be called the National or the State Libraries, Italy, as do other countries, shows its grandest examples of the installation of books. Distinguished among these is the Hall of the Great Council, built between 1310 and 1334, by the most enduring of all Republics, and now the library in the *Ducal Palace at Venice*. After a fire in 1577, it was restored and finished much as we now find it. 175½ feet long and 84½ feet wide, its ceiling, 51½ feet above the floor, is throughout of enormous carved and gilded scrolls, framing paintings, some huge, and all precious. Around the lower part of the walls is a high wainscot of carved walnut, above which is a continuous range of large pictures, and over these, in a gilded bracketed cornice, are the portraits of 72 Doges since the year 809. Bassano, Palma, two sons of Paolo Veronese, Tintoretto, and others have, on walls or ceiling, left masterpieces. Facing all the others, is a painting said to be the largest ever on canvas, 84½ feet long and 34 feet high, the "Glory of Paradise," by Tintoretto, fitting, in subject and in art to crown this majestic hall. Here the venerable Republic fairly enthroned the best work that, at the time, it could obtain from its best masters of art, and here, after the vicissitudes of centuries and the changing agencies of man, that work remains, ennobling the stately home of the books owned by the Mistress of the Adriatic.

Within the last and the present century, especially in the latter, National Libraries have been much developed, and their installation made upon a grand scale.

In what might be called the Germanic group, two of the older collections are of especial importance. For the *Imperial Library at Vienna* an edifice was built in 1722. Here are about 350,000 volumes, including 12,000 of the fifteenth century. Most of them are in a spacious and imposing hall, Roman in style, with a domed centre, and elsewhere a 'semicircular' vault, panelled and frescoed. There are imitation red marble pillars and entablatures, and

gilt decoration. Cases are of dark wood. It is more imposing than the King's Library in the British Museum, but it is not as well constructed, and the exhibit of early printed books is hardly as remarkable.

The great library of Bavaria, at *Munich*, with over 850,000 volumes, thought to be the continental collection next in size to that at Paris, occupies a vast edifice, built between 1832 and 1842, in Florentine style. It has, or had, a yellowish red exterior, and a very white interior, except the Grand Staircase, which is very imposing, and the Hall of the Dukes and Kings of Bavaria, where there are, or were, intensely red walls. Wooden floors abound, and wooden cases and shelves hold the books. The *Incunabulæ* are fine, but here again the British Museum is not equalled.

The *National Library* of France, at *Paris*, originated in small collections of books made by the sovereigns during the latter part of the fifteenth century. Great additions were made, chiefly by Louis XIV., and at the suppression of the monasteries in 1789. Like the government, the name has been often changed. Until the overthrow of the monarchy, and again, 1815 to 1848, it was *Bibliothèque du Roi*; after 1789 it was *Nationale*, a term resumed 1848 to 1852; to 1815 it was *Impériale*, and again that from 1852 to 1870, since which last date it has been, for the third time, *Nationale*. About the year 1721, it was installed in the Hotel de Mazarin, near the centre of the city, where it remains. This structure, too large, good and interesting to be destroyed, even in Paris, has, in time, been altered and enlarged to make it more fitted for its uses, so that it is, or lately was, 540 feet long by 130 feet wide, enclosing a court 300 by 90. Hence, there are both old and curious rooms or parts, and also others new, in modern French style. Among the latter is the Reading Room, large and handsome, but not nearly as imposing as the Rotunda in the British Museum. In combined number and value of

its books, this collection is thought to be, at least, second now, or ever, existing. At a time when its present and prospective need of space was evident, an edifice, not surpassed, if equalled, throughout France in historic interest, in art, in site and possibilities of adaptation was ruthlessly destroyed. There is no prophet to forecast the future; there are persons who do not like to see great treasures very near a dormant volcano.

England's great collection in London has not had to change its name on an average of every dozen years for the last hundred; it stays the *British Museum*. It may be said to date from large government purchases in 1754, and an important gift by George II., in 1757, but its age is really much greater. "The history of its component parts extends over three centuries," says Mr. Edwards. Indeed, as he continues, "every part and almost every age of the world has contributed something"—very large somethings in many cases, we may add. Since its origin and its opening, January 15, 1759, it has by national grants, and even more by private gifts, grown to immensity, so that one of its marked characteristics is its universality, and, at the same time, its nationality; in these it is preëminent.

For the installation very great space is required. Even the present edifice, built between 1823 and 1854, huge as it is—covering seven acres—has proved inadequate, and sundry parts, Natural History and others, have been removed to South Kensington.

Among the many halls, the largest and most imposing for books alone, is the King's Library, 300 feet long and 65 feet wide at the centre. It is in simple, but rich Roman style, lined by Corinthian pillars of marble, except near the centre, where they are of red Peterhead granite, with capitals of Derbyshire alabaster. All are polished, as are the oak cases between them. The books, mostly in fine bindings, are covered by glazed steel doors with gilded

brass sashes. In horizontal cases along the floor, is a probably matchless array of precious volumes, showing the art of book-making from early illuminated manuscripts, block-books, and the first printed by movable types. Following are the first in many a country, city, town; first editions of works by the great English authors, and their autographs—forms in which the greatest of the world's literatures came into being. Further, are the handwritings of the many who have shaped the history of the Island-home and the world-wide Empire of the British race.

Large and costly as was the original edifice, it was not planned with enough foresight of growth, though this has proved surprising, we may well say. Additions have been made on all sides, the chief of them the Reading Room, occupying an extensive courtyard. It is a domed hall, about 150 feet in diameter, said to be the largest in the world, opened in 1857. All around it and in it are cases filled with books, most of them richly bound. The coloring has been changed from time to time. When the writer first saw it (1860) there were gilded ribs on a blue ground; four years later he saw light buff with blue in panels, and gilded mouldings—the iron frame showing through with rather ill effect.

The library of the British Museum, with its immense accumulation of rare and precious books, and its full special collections, is such an one as can only be made by generations of enlightened, devoted, and also wealthy collectors, and that can hardly, or never, again be duplicated. A younger nation can, however, aided by like collectors, make fair progress on the same lines, and at the same time form an institution that will, in its way, have corresponding value.

The *United States* of America has, through several generations been gathering a library that has grown to be national. Its lodgings had become utterly insufficient and overcrowded, and in the latter part of the nineteenth cen-

ture the required new installation was provided. At what some persons think is the climax of human civilization, and with all the example and teaching that might then be had, the work was performed. Viewing suggestive, astonishing, or we may say awful, evidence of what has been and might be in governmental art, we might naturally have misgivings about what we would find in the edifice provided for our national library, and that must long remain as monumental evidence of our degree of civilization. We can have sensations or form opinions without seeing the world, or knowing what mankind has elsewhere done, but we can feel and think better if we have seen and known all we can of the world and its works.

I wish that every American could feel the thrill of surprise and delight, yes and of exaltation as an American, that I felt when I first saw and examined our New National Library in Washington, and that I also felt the wide world gave me reason to feel. Positively and comparatively, here is a triumph. Here is true American Imperialism; not the bedlam of Jingoism, but the work of a great people gathering from all time and all lands, and from their widespread homes the records and the appliances of civilization, all to be saved, and held and used for human good in these throne-rooms of the Republic.

For form and style, the Italian Renaissance has been adopted, the most sumptuous creation of the great Ages of the Revival of Learning, of its diffusion by printing, and of discovery in geography and science. Here is a palace that in extent and richness might, if he could see it, cause Palladio to sigh that he had no United States to make real, designs in the style he loved and developed.

For site, wide, open grounds were taken, with abundant light, sunshine, good air, shrubbery, and security. The edifice measures 470 feet from north to south, by 340 feet from east to west, and, including four courts, covers three and three-quarters acres, or an area more than half that of

the British Museum. It is to be remembered, however, that this edifice is only for books, safe and good accommodation for 4,500,000 of which is provided on forty miles of metal shelving. For the various practical purposes of a great library, the structure with its details is a worthy monument of American intelligence. Equally worthy it is also as a monument of the national abilities in art, indeed of the harmony and possible union of the practical and the artistic. It is another evidence of American genius in combining beauty with use, shown, for example, a generation ago in the clipper-ship, with its remarkable sailing qualities and gracefulness of outlines; shown here in adapting sumptuous Renaissance and all the Fine Arts, and making them give due richness and dignity to a great engine for daily use and service.

The Entrance Hall, the Great Staircase and Corridors, with their complexity and their profusion, not waste of appropriate decoration, suggest the exuberant fancy and the mastery of Piranesi the elder. The Dome at the centre is worthy of Imperial Rome; the many halls and cabinets of the lordliest ecclesiastic or civilian of the sixteenth century.

Color has been added to fineness of material and charm of form. There was a time in our land when a cold gray, in dreary monotone, was thought to be the supreme correctness of taste and fashion. But the Lord never made His fair earth beneath us or His glorious heavens above us that way, and let us be further thankful, He did not make us or the ladies that way.

Whether we consider American current affairs, or Art, or History, this edifice is prominent, and especially in the latter, where it has, and will have, a marked place.

Examine the great libraries, past and existing, and also many that are minor, and we find that, in most cases, care for their preservation, also thought for their due installation, were good as circumstances permitted. We find that

not only have they been cherished, but that interest, often great personal interest, has become an important part of them. They are monuments both of the civilization and the art of their times, and also of the life itself of eminent men.

Some of the best spirit of the later Middle Ages lingers still in the monastic repose and beauty of Chester and of Durham; at Alnwick and at Blenheim are the lordliness and stateliness of the great seats, hardly less impressive and important in their time—at the latter and at Althorp the homes of two of the world's chief collectors and preservers; at Abbotsford is the world's almost unique creation, solace, arsenal, of one of its noblest men of genius; at Rome and at Sienna are glories of the Church enshrined in Italian art; at Venice, with like sumptuous installation, the life of the oldest of Republics seems yet prolonged; at the great capitals are triumphs of Peace achieved by nations.

And now, at the Capital of our own land, is a worthy edifice to combine all these; here is no vanity of boast, but substance of fact in glory of achievement; well as can be, means for preservation and for use are provided; here the simply practical and the treasures of human labor and thought are enshrined in majesty and beauty.

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