THE BRITISH BOOKMAKER.

Notable Bookmakers.

THE LATE WILLIAM BLADES.

Among modern bookmakers it would be impossible to find a more suitable subject for this series than William Blades, the biographer of Caxton. His life's work was essentially that of a bookmaker, for he was practically acquainted with every branch of the craft, and possessed a more complete knowledge of its history than any man of his generation. For long years he searched every nook and corner that was likely to give up some hitherto overlooked link, and it was by such ceaseless diligence, begotten of a natural love for his work, that he produced the standard works which will place his name among the teachers of future generations of students. Though it is but a few months since he passed away, the value of his later writings is meeting ready recognition, and the "Miscellanies" which he left incomplete are already becoming text books in the world of bookmaking.

William Blades was born at Clapham on Decr. 5th, 1824, and received his education at the Clapham Grammar School from the Rev. Charles Pritchard. He entered his father's firm in 1840, where he was thoroughly trained in the practical knowledge of printing. Shortly after his seven years' apprenticeship he was admitted as a partner in the firm, and his first publishing effort was a reprint of Caxton's "Governayle of Helthe." This was followed by a facsimile, in 1859, of "Morale Proverbes,", and in 1861 his chef d'œuvre, "The Life and Typography of William Caxton," appeared in two vols. In the production of this he was assisted by letters from Sir A. Panizzi and Mr. Winter Jones of the British Museum. Every part of the kingdom and abroad was visited in quest of the desired facts, and much valuable and trustworthy information on Caxton's works was thus acquired.

During the progress of this work we are introduced to one of the most eminent bibliographical scholars of the day—Henry Bradshaw, of Cambridge. It appears that in the year 1860 Mr. Blades visited Cambridge, taking the first two sheets of his book in print and the rest in MS., and after dinner, in the garden, he read to Mr. Bradshaw the historical portion of his book, and received the criticisms and suggestions of his willing listener, who was already deep in the minute of Caxton Typography. The friendship between them lasted for nearly twenty-five years, but, unfortunately, the natural dilatoriness of Bradshaw, who would not send his proof out without verifying every entry, compelled Mr. Blades for a time to proceed without waiting for him.

Mr. Blades was a member of the livery of the Scriveners Company, and took great personal interest in the ward of Candlerick, besides being a member of the Candlerick Ward Club, whose history he had written. As a benefactor to the Printers' Pension Corporation at Wood Green, he will be remembered. When, in 1881, extensive repairs became necessary, he, almost single-handed, undertook their supervision, and was unremittingly in his attention to the wants of the inmates.

The various works he undertook all bear the same careful impress that was so marked a characteristic of the man. He made his books his personal friends, and his aid was always freely given to those who, in pure love, sought his assistance. The active part taken in the "Caxton Memorial Window" in St. Margaret's, Westminster, and the famous Caxton Exhibition of 1877, were further proofs of his love for the art. In his office in Abchurch-lane might be seen hanging on the wall the pelt balls and brayer he used when a lad. His somewhat sudden death occurred in April last, just as he was about to celebrate the fiftieth year of his connexion with the craft he loved so well. He rests in the cemetery of the pleasant village of Sutton, in Surrey, where he had made his home.
Book-case with Chained Books in Hereford Cathedral.

The chained books were characteristic of the man. He made his books for his readers, and his readers were his inmates. He cared for his books, and his books cared for his readers. They were not ornaments, but tools, and the tools of the trade. They were not to be played with, but to be used. They were not to be read once and cast aside, but to be read again and again. They were not to be destroyed, but to be preserved. They were not to be forgotten, but to be remembered. They were not to be neglected, but to be cherished. They were not to be taken for granted, but to be appreciated. They were not to be taken for granted, but to be appreciated. They were not to be taken for granted, but to be appreciated.
Limit of space will not permit of even a brief outline of his works here, but the latest that came from his pen, "Chained Books," being Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the series of "Bibliographical Miscellanea," is so characteristic of the man in the thoroughness and completeness with which the work has been done, and for the light it throws on old-world customs, that it is too interesting to be passed over without full notice.

The first of these interesting pamphlets was ready for publication at the time of the author's lamented death in April last and the MS. of the rest was almost completed. The four parts contain a very interesting description of chained books and libraries at present existing in the United Kingdom, Italy, etc., and are illustrated with wood engravings and photo-collotype prints of the chained libraries at Wimborne Minster, Hereford Cathedral (which was described by Mr. W. Salt Brassington in the third volume of The Bookbinder), the Laurentian Library, Florence, etc. The publishers, Messrs. Blades, East & Blades, Abchurch-lane, E.C., have kindly lent the two illustrations used in this notice, and we extract a few paragraphs in description from the work itself.

"The custom of fastening books to their shelves by chains was common at an early period throughout all Europe. When a book was given to a medieval library it was necessary, in the first place, to buy a chain, and, as the book was of especial value, a pair of clasps; secondly, to employ a stonemason to put them on; and, lastly, a painter to write the name and class-mark across the fore-edge. Large collections of chained books were for the use of particular bodies of students; but when religious zeal made many people feel the want of spiritual food, it led to the chaining of single volumes in churches, where any parishioner, able to read, could satisfy his soul. The Bible was, of course, one of the most common, and among others were Fox's "Book of Martyrs," the various works of Bishop Jewel, and other divines.

"The old records of various colleges have numerous entries concerning the cost of chains, of rods, of rings, and of wages paid for enamelling. In 1444 great inconvenience was felt from the overcrowded state of the library at Oxford University, where, all the books being chained, the students were continually jostling one another. So a petition was got up to Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, a book-lover whose name is always green in the memory of bibliophiles, that he would assist in obtaining an enlargement of the library. The petitioners state their grievance very tersely in good Latin, and complain that 'should any student be poring over a single volume, as often happens, he keeps three or four others away on account of the books being chained so closely together.' Perhaps the most complete account of the whole process of erecting the shelves and desks, and chaining the books, will be found in the archives of Eton College for the years 1519-20 et seq. These chains were all removed exactly two centuries later. In the reign of Henry III. the whole Library of Oxford University consisted of only a few books, some of which were chained, and some locked in chests in St. Mary's Church.

"Probably the largest collection of chained books in existence is in the Laurentian Library at Florence, where they rest, large and small, upon richly carved wooden desks.

"Single books chained in churches were quite common in the Reformation Days, and may even now be seen occasionally. In the town of Wimborne a copy of Fox's "Book of Martyrs" was, in bygone days, chained to a desk in the dissenting chapel—a rather unusual occurrence—nor are there wanting records which tell of whole collections, where each volume was chained in its place as it stood on the shelf. Such libraries are, however, now very uncommon, and, with the exception of the remarkable old library in Hereford Cathedral, the writer is not aware of any collection in England approaching in interest and extent that at Wimborne Minster.

"Against the walls of this old treasure-house are erected shelves, the arrangement of which will be understood better by a glance at our illustration than by a long description. Nearly all the books are chained. The chains are formed of rod-iron bent into a figure 8, with one end twisted round the middle for strength. We know the date when the library was founded, and therefore of these rude chains—it was 1686. Each chain is about 3 feet long, and has at one end a ring like a curtain ring, which, running along an iron rod, allows considerable play. Thus you can take any book from its place to a desk at a little distance and there consult it, but you cannot take it away. There must have been some advantages in this plan, or it would not have been generally adopted; but, apparently, great disadvantages must have been experienced also. If the chains were a check upon stealing the books, they were certainly no preventive against damage and mutilation, as many of the volumes unfortunately prove. To lug out a heavy volume by the cover does not tend to preserve the binding. The present shelving is modern (1836); the old boards having become too rotten for safety. The old desks, too, which afforded a resting-place for the volumes when consulted, have disappeared, so that for purposes of reference it would be very inconvenient to really use a single book without unchaining it." ["Books in Chains" is published, part 2 at 1/6, and parts 3, 4, and 5 in one, at 4/6.]
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William Blades
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Chained Books in Wimborne Minster.