An Old English Library.

BY W. SALT BRASSINGTON.

Few old parish libraries are more interesting than that which is preserved in the fourteenth-century half-timber School House at King's Norton, in Worcestershire. Probably few are so little known.

The library was formed by Thomas Hall, the Puritan Curate of King's Norton, who was not a mere collector of books, but an author also. "Funebria Floræ, or the Downfall of May Games," and "Comarum ἀκοσμία, or the Loathesomnesse of Long Haire," are his best known works.

Thomas Hall was born at Worcester in the year 1610. He entered Balliol College, Oxford, in 1624; at the end of his first term he migrated to Pembroke College; he received the curacy of King's Norton about 1633, and held it until 1662, when he was ejected; he bestowed his library upon the parish, probably between the years 1662-65, and died, presumably of the plague, on April 13th, 1665.

During a period of two hundred and twenty years the library has received no additions, and, save for the loss of some of the volumes, and the decay of others, it remains much as it was in the days of the "Merrie Monarch," Charles II.

In the MS. Catalogue we find record of 876 volumes, of which we may mention the following: choice editions of the Classics, fine folios of the Fathers, the works of Erasmus, Jewel, and Calvin, poems by Lord Sterling and Sylvester, early editions of Bacon's "Essays," Stubbes's "Anatomy of Abuses," Bernard's "Isle of Man," and Purchas's "Pilgrims"; several American Tracts, including the "Virginia" sermon of 1619; a goodly collection of Civil War Tracts, Oxford printed books, polemical treatises, and sermons.

The books are clothed in their original calf and vellum coats; some of the latter display the brilliant colours and curious music of richly illuminated service-books, of which the
vellum once formed the leaves. Many of the bindings are furnished with leather tags or thongs instead of clasps, and small slips of vellum or paper, to be used as book-markers, fastened to the end covers. Corpulent tomes, containing a collection of pamphlets, are bound in plain brown calf; but since Hall wished his parishioners to borrow his books, and to return them, he had stamped upon each cover the initial letters of his name, thus: TH.

The folios are massively bound in oak or beech boards covered with stout leather. The clasps were of brass (I use the past tense advisedly, because the hinge plates alone remain). It will be noticed that in bindings dating from the seventeenth century and earlier, the titles of the books are not lettered upon the backs, as is now the invariable rule. It was the custom in old libraries to write the titles upon the fore-edge of the leaves, and to place the books upon the shelves back-inwards; then the clasps formed convenient handles wherewith to take down the books, and by frequent use the hinges at length gave way, and the clasps were lost.

The library possesses examples of sixteenth century bindings, not, indeed, resplendent in colour and glittering with golden ornament in the style of the Renaissance, like the work executed for the collector Jean Grolier de Servin, but sober German, Dutch, and English Gothic blind-tooled work.

From the sixth to the fifteenth century the art of bookbinding remained in the hands of the monks, who enriched the sides of the bindings with Gothic ornament, at once an alphabet and epitome of religion, history, and legend. With the invention of printing came an increased demand for bindings, which soon led to the establishment of the art of bookbinding as a separate craft—an art-trade, it would now be called; but Caxton, Wynkyn de Worde, Pynson, and Julian Notary, the first English printers, were bookbinders also. Their style of ornament was pure Gothic.

Towards the close of the fifteenth century many books were printed in octavo size; then a new and more suitable method of producing ornamentation was devised, the small tools were abandoned for stamps of a larger size, one stamp, or at most two stamps, being sufficient embellishment for the side of a volume. This method originated, probably, at Ghent, spread rapidly into France, and from thence was introduced into England before the year 1500 by Julian Notary, who ornamented his blocks with heraldic devices, similar to the example given by Mr. Wheatley on p. 120 of the Bookbinder. A peculiarity of the early stamped bindings is, that the stamp was cut in intaglio, producing the impression in cameo.

Three marks are accredited to Julian Notary, one—his device upon a shield within an upright parallelogram, nearly square—having his name at the bottom. The second consists simply of the device or mark with the letters I. N. in Saxon capitals. The third, the device within an upright parallelogram; instead of the letters I. N. within the circle, the name Julian Notarie is printed in two lines.

John Reynes followed, working on the same lines and excelling his predecessors in the beauty of his designs and in the excellence of workmanship and finish.

To John Reynes three marks are attributed—

I. A small shield, upon which the initial letters of his name appear bound together by a true-lovers' knot.
II. The same letters bound together in a less complicated manner. This mark occurs on the design of St. George and Dragon (a sketch of which we propose to give in a future number).

III. A monogram upon a shield. The first and third are used together frequently, but on late examples the monogram alone, without the shield, is placed in the centre of the design.

The present illustration is taken from the King's Norton copy of the "Quaestiones" of John de Turre Cremata (Torquemada), printed at Leyden by J. Vingle in 1509, and from a copy of the "Speculum Aureum" of Pepin, printed at Paris by Jehan Petit (probably about 1518, but the date of the prefatory epistle is 1508), from the collection of Mr. E. Gordon-Duff, to whom I am indebted for useful information and suggestions.

There are similar examples in the Bodleian and British Museum Libraries. The design is one of the largest and most beautiful produced by Reynes. It is called "Redemptoris Mundi Arma." The arms of the Saviour of the World, an arrangement of the instruments of our Lord's Passion, after the fashion of an ancient plate of arms similar to the garter-plates in St. George's Chapel, Windsor. The block measures $5 \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ in. At the top is a border of twined riband, at the
sides are borders of conventional flowers, a smaller border of flowers within the larger forms the outline of a canopy. The shield: a cross occupies the centre, upon it may be seen the superscription, crown of thorns, spear, rod with a sponge and three nails. On the dexter (right) side: a palm branch, hammer, pierced hand, garment, dice and dice-box. Upon the sinister (left) side: the pincers, lantern, head of Judas Iscariot with the money-bag hanging round his neck, thirty pieces of silver, and the sepulchre. The shield is surmounted by a royal helmet, above which is a wreath; out of it spreads a scroll-like mantle of twelve lambrerquins. The crest is the pillar of flagellation, surmounted by the cock that crew when St. Peter denied Christ; attached to the pillar by a cord are two birch rods, and two scourges. The motto on a label under the shield, "Redemptoris Mundi Arma," in Saxon capitals. Supporters: two unicorns, emblems of purity and strength. John Reynes' marks occupy the space on either side of the crest. The block is not set square, showing that, probably, it was stamped in a press. This binding complies with the canon that—"Every book should be decorated without, as far as possible in accordance with its contents, and every tool should be beautiful in itself."

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**The Principles of Design as Applied to Bookbinding.**

**By Henry B. Wheatley, F.S.A.**

**CLOTH BINDING. (Continued from page 132.)**

The history of cloth binding ought to be one of great interest to us, as it is entirely of English growth (the French call it *la toile anglaise*, and the Germans *Englisches Einband*), and its introduction is comparatively so recent, that we are able to trace the sequence of the various changes that this special form of binding has gone through. Books at the beginning of the present century were usually issued in paper boards, of various colours, with white paper labels, upon which the title of the book was printed. This was by no means a bad binding, but after a little use the paper was apt to crack at the hinge, so that the side got disconnected from the back. About 1822 a remedy for this was suggested, by covering the back with calico or cloth. This may be illustrated by a set of the old library edition of Scott's "Waverley Novels," in octavo. The "Novels and Tales," 12 vols., were issued in 1819, in pink paper, with white paper labels. The "Historical Romances," 6 vols., appeared in 1822, in blue paper, with pink cloth back and white paper labels; and the "Novels and Romances," in 1824, in the same covering.

The late Mr. Archibald Leighton may be called the father of cloth binding, as to him the earliest specimens of this book-covering have been traced. According to an interesting article on Mr. Leighton, in the *Bookbinder* (No. 7), the first book published in the new