HOLY BIBLE
(CAMBRIDGE, 1660).

From the Royal Library, Windsor Castle.
In the Royal Library, Windsor Castle.

What is the age of Windsor Castle? Is a question which cannot be answered precisely, but certainly it has been a royal residence since the days of Henry II., and may date back to the Norman Conquest, for there are many lower parts of the older buildings which are of decidedly Norman type. But by bit, however, the original fortress has been built over and built around until its original appearance has been hidden, and it has grown until its outer walls contain as many people as might throng a decent sized town; but with all its growing during eight centuries, it had never grown big enough to hold a library until the days of King William IV., when the happy idea of adding a few shelves was conceived, and by him the present Royal Library was commenced just sixty years ago.

Most of our past monarchs have been more deeply engrossed in the arts of war or the follies of peace, than in the pursuit of letters—dead letters, as Queen Anne called them. Had they been book lovers, what precious treasures this venerable pile of buildings might have contained; but alas, whatever else of value has been at various times stored there, we can scarcely ever find in any records the mention of such a tiresome thing as a book. Even with so celebrated a bookish queen as Elizabeth, who lived a great deal at Windsor, we find no record of books there. In Paul Hentzner's "Journey into England" there is a great deal about Windsor Castle as it was shortly before Queen Elizabeth's death, and some notice of its treasures. He speaks of two bathrooms Ceiling and wainscoted with looking glass; of seeing the chamber in which Henry VI. was born; of Queen Elizabeth's chamber in which was a table of red marble with white streaks; of a gallery everywhere ornamented with emblems and figures; of a collection of royal beds, comprising, amongst others, those of Henry VII. and his Queen, of Henry VIII. and Anne Boleyn, and of Edward VI., "all of them eleven feet square" and covered with quilts shining with gold and silver. He also saw some wonderful tapestry; the horn of a unicorn worth £10,000 (we wonder what would be the price of this marvel had it been preserved to us); a bird of Paradise; and a cushion most curiously worked by Queen Elizabeth's own hands; but not a word about books. Not that he was unmindful of them; they were in London. "In Whitehall are the following things worthy of observation. 1. The Royal Library, well stored with Greek, Latin, Italian, and French books. All these books are bound in velvet of different colours, though chiefly red, with clasps of gold and silver; some have pearls and precious stones set in their bindings." This library was, however, but a private collection for the Queen's own use, added to by presents, for wherever the Queen went, a book was presented to her, largely as a tribute to her learning, and special orders were sent out by Lord Burghley to those intending to give:—"Present a book well bound and regard that the book hath no savour of spike, which commonly bookbinders do seek to add to make their books savour well."

Her Majesty loved not lavender.

Bishop Parker tried to induce Elizabeth to form a National Library, but he got little more encouragement from her than the permission to go and hunt up the lost treasures of the suppressed monasteries, many of which when recovered he had transcribed at the scriptorium he established at Canterbury and which afterwards he gave to Cambridge. The principal action of James I. was a sort of maudlin generosity to Bodley, a warrant under the privy seal allowing Bodley to take any books he wanted from the royal palaces for his new library at Oxford. Neither Charles I. nor Charles II. cared much for books; the latter even forgot to pay his binders' bills and his books remained in pawn for the worth of their coverings. Queen Anne was somewhat better, but when advised by Harley to buy the splendid collection of Sir Symonds D'Ewes, her kindliness of heart prevented her, and not while the blood and honour of the nation were at stake would she consent to bestow the money of her subjects upon what she termed "dead letters."

Down to the time of George III. the Royal Library remained in London, and was never of much account until, in 1762, George III. purchased the collection of Joseph Smith, the English consul at Venice, which forms the best part of the King's Library given to the British Museum by George IV.

There is little doubt that it was this disposal of the King's Library in the British Museum for the benefit
of the nation that brought about the establishment of the Royal Library at Windsor by William IV., with whom Windsor was a favourite residence, and it was owing to the lack of books that he commenced to bring together the better parts of the collections of Ken, Hampton Court, Kensington, and other palaces, so that a good start was made with some fine works.

The great bulk of the present collection of upwards of 100,000 volumes has, however, been made during the present reign, and the credit of it must remain with H.R.H. the late Prince Consort. Shortly after his marriage with the Queen he began to study how to make better arrangements for the library, and secured a liberal annual sum for its extension, besides other departments of literature and the fine arts, and endeavouring to make it representative especially of the libraries of English monarchs. At the present time, from Henry VIII. to our Queen, there is only one sovereign unrepresented by a book specially bound for her or bearing her arms—Mary Tudor.

The entrance to the Royal Library, for the privileged visitor who obtains Her Majesty's permission to inspect its treasures—for it must be remembered that this is, after all, really a private collection—is at the Equerries' Entrance, just to the left of the great Round Tower. From thence you ascend a staircase to the first floor, where you enter a lofty room with a groined ceiling, which opens into a large chamber where the drawings, engravings, and works of art are kept. The fine arts are specially well represented; chief, are the drawings by Leonardo da Vinci. No collection can be compared with this but those of Florence and Milan; there are three volumes of drawings by this artist, comprising every form of study, which were brought to England by Sir Peter Lely from the Arundel sale in Holland, and were bought by Charles II. Raphael and Michael Angelo are represented by some of their choicest work, and these alone would make the reputation of any gallery in Europe. The drawings of Hans Holbein are invaluable, especially the unrivalled collection of eighty-seven historical portraits in red chalk and Indian ink of the principal personages of the court of Henry VIII.

The Raphael cabinet contains a collection formed by the late Prince Consort, consisting of every engraving, drawing, or other mode of illustration which could be obtained that throws any light upon "the mental processes and modes of operation of the great artist in the creation of each of his pictures." This vast mass of material occupies over thirty immense portfolios—cut short as it was by the lamented death of His Royal Highness—and would prove almost unwieldy but for the separate catalogue which has been printed by order of Her Majesty.

In one corner of the room we first entered, against the window, is a small spiral iron staircase leading to the upper part of the library. At one time all the apartments of Windsor Castle opened out, the one into another, until they formed one continuous corridor; but in modern times staircases have been cut here and there to facilitate ingress and egress, and this iron staircase, incongruous with the older building, is one of the modern improvements. It leads into a large chamber called the Charles II. room, having been one of the private apartments of that monarch, as this part of the building was at different periods the private apartments of several sovereigns. It is now filled from floor to ceiling with bookshelves all round the sides, while large cabinets stand in the centre, on which, in cases, are some of Her Majesty's presents. A large oblong album from New South Wales, with views of the exhibition, bound in purple velvet with exquisitely designed silver gilt ornaments; an address album, with gold mounts, from New Guinea, and the plumage of a bird; an album presented to the Queen by Sir Dinshaw Manockjee, petit baronet, Sep., 1891, bound in Indian silver relief work, with a beautifully pierced border, and preserved in an ivory case inlaid with ebony and silver. At one end of the room is a reading desk, inlaid with "C.R." in monogram, which belonged to Queen Charlotte.

From the Charles II. room we pass into Queen Anne's room, also fitted with rows of bookshelves. This was originally one of the apartments of Henry VII. In the centre, before the mullioned windows, are octagonal glass cases filled with charters, seals, dishes, spoons, drinking glasses, jewellery, etc., of bygone kings and queens. One case is filled with most magnificent specimens of Persian and Indian work in manuscripts and bindings. Here is a little alcove built projecting from the walls and affording a most delightful view over the surrounding country, where Queen Anne was sitting with the Duchess of Marlborough when the news arrived of the great victory at Blenheim, August 13th, 1704.

Next we enter Queen Elizabeth's room, with its beautiful old-fashioned fireplace, large enough to hold a family party, with fine overmantel in which is set a bust of Bess in her high frills. Here, besides the rows upon rows against the walls, and the projecting shelves, are some fine cases full of the books gradually collected as representative of the libraries of other monarchs.

And now let us look at a few of the rarities which the library contains, first thanking its royal mistress for the permission so kindly extended to the writer; and next R. R. Holmes, Esq., F.S.A., librarian to Her Majesty, who so courteously assisted us in our inquisitiveness.

Chief among the few we shall have space to mention are the famous "Menz Psalter" of 1457, a splendid and perfect copy; a copy of Coverdale's Bible of 1535, of which no perfect copy is known to be in existence. Amongst other Caxtons here is the "Esop's Fables" of 1584, the only perfect copy known.

Here is a decree of Frederick, king of Naples, Sicily and Jerusalem, 1488, in an Italian binding of but little later date, with blind interlaced work with gold stars and other small ornaments. On the reverse side there is a large raised circular piece caused by a panel sunk from the inside to contain the great seal of that king; a curious piece of workmanship.

A magnificent copy of the Koran, written by Harun Ben Bayazid, 1613-1614, which formerly belonged to the Emperor Aurungzib, having been purchased by him for 9,000 rupees. It afterwards came into the
possession of Tippoo Sultaun, and then into the hands of the directors of the East India Company, who sent it to the Royal Library in 1807.

In the same case is a manuscript history of Shah Jehan of Delhi, father of Aurungzib, written by Mohammed Amin of Meshed in 1685, and ornamented throughout with full-page illuminations of the highest style of painting of the period. It is stated to have cost the Nawab of Lucknow £1,500. The cover is a magnificent piece of painting upon water gold.

A magnificently illuminated copy of the poem "Shah Nama," by Firdusi, bears an inscription in the book that it "is now presented by the exalted in dignity His Majesty Shah Kamram as a rare gift and token of friendship to the Morning Star of Sovereignty . . . Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain, in the month of Shuval 1255 A.H., Dec. 1839 A.D." The enamelled Persian binding of this poem is one of the most beautiful pieces of work we have ever seen.

"More Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands," a copy written in Persian and bound in Persia in 1885, is a good example of later Persian work, with small sunk panels, the gold underlaid with green.

Of the royal bindings, we have here two or three examples of the time of Henry VIII., with panel blocks on the sides by G. G. and H. N., but there is no evidence that they ever belonged to that king. "The Kingses Revenues," a MS. report of commissioners in 1522, bound for Edward VI., is in the "Venecion fascion," favoured by Berthelet, and was probably bound by him.

"M. Tulli Ciceronis Epistolæ Familiæ," Venice, 1549, was bound for the Princess Elizabeth, with the badge of her mother (Anne Boleyn) in gold on the side, and the letter F. repeated round the crest and at head and tail in blind.

"The Faerie Queen," bound for Queen Elizabeth, is in brown calf blocked, with a gold Tudor rose on each side, and the letters E. R.

There are several bindings executed for James I., Henry Prince of Wales, his eldest son, and the ill-fated Charles I., but none of any particular merit; noticeable, however, is the "Eikon Basilike," 1648, which has silver clasps containing relief profile portraits of Charles I.; while another copy, dated 1649, has a silver medallion on the side with winged female figures around the portrait, and engraved silver flat corners.

A "Holy Bible," Cambridge, 1660, presented to Charles II., is a magnificent example of English work in imitation of the Eve and Le Gascon styles, probably the work of Hugh Hutchinson, the binder for Bishop Cosin. It is bound in black morocco. (See illustration.)

The "Eikon Basilike" of 1681 is a really beautiful piece of contemporary inlaid work, with a curious intertwining of green and open work lace-in filling in with pointille and solid line tools.

Two very curious bindings, probably executed in Germany by Italian workmen, with a strange mixture of rococo and other ornaments, partly inlaid, may be found on a "Tasso, Gerusalemme Liberata," 1745, and a "Biblia Sacra," both executed for George III., when Prince of Wales. The German Bible is dedicated to him, and has inside a painting of the Prince. But not only is the whole style of the outside curious, probably unique, but inside, the vellum linings, inlaid with leather, bear a most extraordinary compound of marbling and smearing which has a most grotesque effect. Nowhere else have we seen anything like it.

Here are "Hours of the B.V.M.," a vellum MS. of the late fifteenth century, bound in red velvet, embroidered with gold and silk in a border with floral corners and the royal arms, crown, and cardinal's hat for Henry Benedict, Cardinal York, after 1788, given to the Prince of Wales, afterwards George IV. A "Biblia Sacra," Wittenberg, 1584, in its original panel blocked binding, with portraits of Luther and Melancthon in oil colours in sunk panels. An "Imitatione Christi," 1508, bound for Marguerite de Valois, and many other works, the style of which is more or less well known, so that even the specialist in bindings will find his visit to Windsor worth the trouble.

Looking around the library, and estimating it generally, it is a mighty comfortable place—its carpeted floors, its long stretch of promenade for the restless thinker, its grand outlook upon quiet and peaceful scenes, and its sense of restfulness within. It is beautifully furnished, the many varied hues of its bindings harmonise, and the numbers of books in white vellum with gleaming gold make it light and pleasant to the eye; it has no appearance of dusty tomes, the decaying brains of bygone wiseacres. We had felt curious as to the truth of silly assertions ever and anon repeated about the prevailing colour of the books, and many other absurdities begotten, perhaps, of the same inanity which created a heaven of two instruments and one song. We were agreeably impressed with the home-like look of this august study, and pleased to see the care and attention given to the preservation of every minute part of a book's individuality. As an example of this, there are some volumes of "Telemachus," printed in Anspach, 1727, by Johann Valentin Lüders, which were originally stitched together with a curious paper cover. They have been rebound in white vellum, and in order to preserve the papers the sides have been cut out, leaving a square panel, into which these fine examples of half-marbled, half-smeared papers have been set, forming a very pretty style of binding.