

A Prince's Princely Library.

A BONAPARTE AS A BOOK GATHERER.



TO EVERY lover of books the probable fate of the remarkable library collected by Prince Lucien Bonaparte will be a matter of interest. Mr. Victor Collins, as I sat with him in the midst of the library (writes a *Chronicle* interviewer), fully agreed that it ought to be so.

Many people know the big house with the red streaks down its face, where Prince Lucien lived, in Norfolk-terrace, Bayswater. Here for four and fifty weeks Mr. Victor Collins has been engaged in the very difficult work of cataloguing the prince's literary treasures.

"And now, I believe," I questioned, thus explaining the reason I sought a chat, "you have nearly finished?"

"Yes," said he, "the bulk of the task is done, but there still remains a certain amount of detail work. I need hardly say that my catalogue will not be in the least a full indication of the library. It will merely be a summary, if I may so express it, indicating in a general way what the contents of the library are. It would have taken ten Oxford dons as many years to investigate and set forth the library thoroughly."

"By which I take it that in the high estimate always placed on the library there has been no kind of exaggeration?"

"Indeed, no. I am perfectly safe in saying that such a philological library has never existed. It is hard to suppose that such another could be created, at least by the efforts of a single individual. Take this list which I have prepared, dividing the library roughly into the three classes of languages—monosyllabic, agglutinative, and inflexidial. Just run your eye down it, and tell me if you ever saw such a representation of different languages and dialects. Yet I venture to say, if the library were exhaustively catalogued, if the years of specialist labour were put into it that it would require, the list would come out doubled."

"Do you happen to know if from the first Prince Lucien intended to make his library a philological one?"

"He did. As a young man he was fond of chemistry, and on one occasion he was desirous of reading a chemical work that happened to exist only in Swedish. He learned Swedish for the purpose, and this gave him a taste for languages, very many of which he studied. His object in forming the library was to discover, rather perhaps to show, the relationship of all languages to each other. Nor was it only distinct languages he included in his plan, but their dialects, their corruptions, even slang, thieves' slang—slang of all kinds. In carrying out his idea the prince had, of course, the advantages of exceptional abilities, and until the fall of the Empire, of unlimited money. Some of those bindings you see here, so beautiful, so rich, so luxurious, must have cost a great deal. As to the

printing, also so beautiful, the prince for long had a fully-fitted printing office down on the basement floor."

"I have heard that Prince Lucien travelled a great deal in pursuit of what I may call his philological mission?"

"A very great deal. He went through Italy and the Basque provinces of Spain with a list of test words drawn up by himself. He would go from village to village, talk with the people in each, and get them to repeat his test words. Thus he noted the differences in the speaking of the words, and as a result of the inquiry, he made linguistic maps of the Basque provinces and Southern Italy. In a word, there was no end to the prince's enthusiasm and to the labour he undertook. No trouble—in later years no sacrifice, one might almost say—was too much if something new, something at the same time valuable, could be added to the library."

"What was the Prince's method of preserving forms of dialect, assuming he did not already find the means in existence?"

"For example, he had—always by the most competent authorities—the Gospel of St. Matthew written in all the Basque dialects. Again, holding that the development of railway intercommunication would soon cause much of our English local dialect to disappear, he had the Song of Solomon written in the English dialects as we know them at present. You know that part of the Song of Solomon beginning, 'I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem.' Listen to it—fine, altogether, I think—in the dialect of the Northumberland colliers:—

'Aw's black, but bonny, Salem lasses,
Like the Kedar-shows;
Or, like the cortins where wor King
Lies under for a doze.
Noo, divent glower at me se
Becas aw's black as seut;
Becas the sun maw skin hes tann'd
Maw mother's bairns cries 'Slut!'

"Essentially the library is a philological one, but I imagine it must include a variety of rare books not philological?"

"Naturally. The prince being a senator of France, a cousin of Louis Napoleon, and a well-known philologist, he had people bring him all sorts of interesting books. Therefore it is not surprising to find that the library includes rare works not present, for instance, in the British Museum. There are three early German Bibles which Mr. Gladstone, visiting the prince once, thought should be presented to the British Museum. To the best of Mr. Gladstone's knowledge one of the three did not exist anywhere else, and either of the three would be worth about £500. They are remarkable specimens of early German printing, and are profusely illustrated. If you notice, the characters in the cuts are habited in the costume and armour, not of Biblical times, but of the times at which the Bibles were printed—the latest 1494. Very valuable are, no doubt, the words for a little book here in Welsh written by Morys Clynoc, afterwards rector of the English College in Rome, under the inspiration of St. Charles Borromeo at Milan. It is a short definition of the Catholic faith, and was prepared to be sent to Wales to preserve the faith there. Some years ago it was

