THE FOLGER SHAKESPEARE MEMORIAL LIBRARY.

By H. B. CHARLTON, M.A.

THE 'restless inquietude for the diuturnity of our memories' has urged men to the endowing of pyramids, arches and obelisks in the pathetic hope of 'extending our memories by monuments': and most of such means of 'being but pyramidally extant' have proved a 'fallacy in duration'. But if oblivion can be frustrated in the blind scattering of her poppy, the founding of a library would seem to be a way in which man may subsist in a more lasting monument. To the names of Bodley, Rylands, Huntington is surely added that of Folger.

A generation ago, when one read of Folger snapping up another Shakespeare Folio, one imagined an American millionaire applying Wall Street methods to the cornering of shares in culture. The impression was wrong. The Folger Library is a precious gift to the world of scholarship; and in the shaping of it, the Founder displayed a fine union of philanthropic largemindedness and cunning insight into the complex mechanisms by which the Library he planned might most faithfully serve learning. He decided to build the Library in Washington where it would be near other treasure-houses of accumulated knowledge. He insisted on making it a place where a student could feel at home, and so he instructed his architect to put open fireplaces in the reading room. He devised its governorship to the officers of an academic corporation, and, though he died before the building was above ground-level, his wisdom has been justified in his governors.

He had already accumulated a large collection of books and MSS. broadly classified as Shakespeare and Shakespeariana. His instinct led him to specialise in collecting, but to specialise generously; and Mr. Rosenbach was at his elbow to advise in the purchasing. The nucleus is Shakespeare; but that leads to Shakespeare's times, his predecessors, his contemporaries, his successors; it leads from drama to poetry, then to politics and
theology; in another line, from fiction to history and travel; and when it takes on criticism, it means covering Shakespeare's repute down the ages. In the main, the Folger collection was a gathering of Elizabethan drama surrounded by everything antecedent, contemporary and consequent, which is pertinent to the full understanding of it. Very fortunately the Trustees, who on Folger's death took over the administration of the Library endowment, secured as its director a man eminently learned in Tudor and Elizabethan letters, Joseph Quincey Adams; and he now presents his first Report of Progress, covering the first ten years of the Library's public service.

It is an exciting and impressive record of achievement. As one watches the spread of the Library's activities, not only in securing more books but in developing the services which make them best available to scholarship, one cannot help but feel that the pioneer activities of our own John Rylands librarian have played their part: the photostat service, the publication of facsimiles (how one envies the owner of a set of Folger facsimiles!), the exhibitions and the lectures—in these ways, Folger now does as the John Rylands has done, except that Folger finances are more opulent.

The main part of the report is devoted to the accessions since Folger's death. The account of them is a tribute to the Founder's foresight, and a testimony to the piety and the wisdom of the Director. The governing principle in extending the Library's stock has been the law that a library is not a heap, but a collection, of books. It does not amass haphazard; it seeks out and chooses. It maps its own field and then plans to bring together all that falls therein. For example, in a general description of the accessions of English Printed Books 1475-1640, the Director says that the guiding principles of purchase have been to secure (1) items of the period believed to be unique; (2) items not represented in American libraries; (3) items which through rarity or intrinsic importance are particularly valuable to students of Elizabethan literature; (4) items which complete or carry towards completion the Folger collections of particular authors; and (5) items that have special bibliographical interest for scholars.

The manner of procuring the items thus desiderated has been
as astutely wise as the principles on which they were chosen. Others before Folger had acquired private libraries, and generally, like Folger, had built them round a main interest. The Folger has followed its founder in looking for opportunities to acquire notable collections which other collectors had brought together. Most notable of its successes in this kind were the purchase of the great Harmsworth collection of printed books, and the acquisition of many of the Loseley Park MSS.

It is impossible to mention here the scores of items the mere naming of which is a thrill to the student of Elizabethan life, thought, drama and poetry. There are MSS. hitherto unknown, and still unpublished; there is the Coleorton Hall collection of early printed plays; there is a complete collection of all printed editions of Massinger's dramas, and eight separate plays with his own MS. corrections of the text; there are the most elusive copies of works by Harington, Daniel, Quarles and Francis Bacon. But two of the accessions recorded must be specially named, as illustrative of the Library's riches and of its principles.

The first is a copy of William Lambarde's *Archaionomia*, 1568. It was bought for a pound from Sotheby's as one of three undescribed items going with King James's *Triplici Nodo*, 1609. The Folger really wanted the *Triplici Nodo*, and thought it worth the pound paid for the particular lot. But it found the included Lambarde particularly and unexpectedly exciting. On the inside of its vellum cover was a curious MS. note: 'Mr. Wm. Shakespere Lived at No 1 Little Crown St. Westminster. N.B. near Dorset steps'. Later, the crumpled title-page was ironed out, and revealed the signature 'Wm. Shakespeare', previously concealed by the many tiny wrinkles. The whole armoury of bibliographical research, microscopic, chemical and photographic, was turned on to the signature; and it seems almost certain that the Folger really has one of the few real Shakespeare signatures.

The other instance illustrates another phase of the Folger in action. After the war had started, the Folger obtained a substantial Rockefeller Foundation grant for buying books. The Foundation requested that, if it was proposed to buy any important item from England which Englishmen might consider 'a national treasure', the approval of appropriate English authorities should
be sought before purchase, and, if purchase was so approved, a complete photo-reproduction of the item purchased should be given to the British Museum. The Folger bought its Donne MSS. with this Rockefeller grant; it gave the British Museum a bound photographic copy. That is the sort of practical Anglo-American fellowship which magnificently symbolises the internationalism of scholarship.