

## THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARIAN.

By H. B. CHARLTON,

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER,  
TRUSTEE AND GOVERNOR OF THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY.

EVERY year, at its January meeting, amongst other formal items of annual business, the Council of the Governors of the John Rylands Library adopts a resolution that the warrant confirming the Librarian in his office, with the duties, authority and powers thereto attached, be renewed for a further year. In some corner of the muniment room there is doubtless a document specifying those duties and powers. But from the Chairman downwards, not a single member of the Council could recite the terms of this bond, nor quote even two consecutive clauses of its formal enactments. Indeed, not more than one or two of the Governors has either seen the warrant or heard it read. And not a single one of the Governors during the last quarter of a century has ever wanted to see it or to hear it read. The Council knows that the great Library it has the honour to govern is in fact something which its Librarian has made; and its approval of the annual resolution is a ritual of pious thanksgiving celebrated in the hope that the Librarian may continue to be able and willing to minister in his own way to the further progress of the John Rylands Library.

The Library is a local, national and international institution; so also is Henry Guppy. I am not now alluding to the insignia of monumental impressiveness with which nature endowed him nor to the additional decorations emblazoned for him by the heraldry of academies and of nations. These have been merely the occasion or the consequence of Guppy's achievements, not their cause. In appearance and in manner he was and is naturally fitted to work the proper spell on all types of people who make a librarian's world. From the outset, the Trustees and Governors recognised the assured bearing of a man who knows the opportunities of his task and inspires confidence by the zeal

he so obviously thirsts to dedicate to its service. The public has found him a majestic symbol of the serene spirit of culture and yet a priest sparing himself no effort to bring them into the mysteries. His staff may have found him exacting, but benignly exacting ; he has never exacted what he himself was not prepared to devote ; and in his government, no manner could combine authority with sympathy better than does his. Even his service staff, from porter to engineer, within their awe of him must have been mainly conscious of his personal care for them ; he has always won their reverence. Above all, his natural manner and his habitual suavity have won for him the gratitude of generations of students, old and distinguished ones, because he appreciated their purpose and spread before them the riches of which he disposed with such unfeigned joy, and young tyros, because he somehow infected them with the feeling that they had in him a monitor and a friend whose real concern was the success of the little dissertations by which they hoped to write themselves Masters of Arts.

In all these functions, the fatherly dignity which nature provided in his appearance has been enhanced by the honourable ribbons which the world has attached to his name. The King honoured him with the C.B.E. ; the University of Louvain, of whose Library he is virtually the second founder, made him Doctor Philosophiae et Litterarum, and Albert of Belgium added to this his medal ; our own University honoured itself by naming him Doctor of Letters *honoris causa* ; and societies of librarians and bibliophiles, as different as the national work-a-day Library Association is from the hierophantically exclusive Roxburghe Club, have inscribed him on their rolls of honour. Henry Guppy, C.B.E., M.A., D.Phil. et Litt. (Louvain), Litt.D. (Manchester), Medaille du roi Albert, and so on. In this fashion the Librarian of the John Rylands Library has been decorated for his achievements, and has been strengthened in those powers which he exercises to go on achieving.

But reiterating that Guppy is an institution, and after listing the regalia which by the gifts of God and the recognition of men he so excellently uses in the service of his Librarianship, one must state unequivocally one's own estimate of Guppy's essential

merit. All the more so, in this increasingly mechanised and institutionalised world. For librarians have now followed our doctors, our lawyers, our dentists and our chartered accountants, in establishing themselves under trade union forms, or as perhaps it is more proper to express it, as a professional corporation closely protected by legal entrenchments, with hierarchic orders duly prescribed, and with appropriate alphabetical symbols to tag on to their names as signs of initiation and of rank. No doubt, rightly : it must be right, for Guppy himself has not only been President of the Library Association ; he has fostered, organised and even conducted courses with the object of qualifying young librarians to rise to associateship or fellowship within the Library Association. Much formalisation is of course necessary to the routine of efficient librarianship. But all mere book-users who run into the Dewey system must be aware of the hazards of library mechanisation. I once sought Anthony à Wood's *Athenae Oxoniensis* in vain amongst Reference, Biographical and History sections of a well-known library (not the John Rylands), and found it under Education, because, I was told, Oxford was a word in the title ! And the librarian did not see the joke even when I pointed it out to him. But Guppy has always seen the machine as a means to the end, or rather, to his end, which has always been the same, the usefulness of the John Rylands Library to the people who make use of it.

Hence this estimate of Guppy's essential merit. It is this : that though he is an institution, he is, first and last, himself, Henry Guppy. His professional supremacy is the outcome of his personality. To say that he is the born librarian is to speak but a fragment of the truth. The whole truth is that he is the born librarian of the John Rylands Library. He is, then, unique. Some few others may justly claim to be the ideal occupants of their office ; but is there any other person who has shaped his office so that it and he become a conjunction realising the ideal of both ?

From youth, Guppy has lived amongst books. It is no part of this article to write a biography of Guppy. He is yet very much alive, and the objective facts of precedent periods of his career are duly recorded in books of reference, whilst achieve-

ments to come will still provide matter for added chapters. But some incidents of the days before he came to the fullness of his present vigour help one to understand what he now is. The more directly personal and domestic phases one must leave out ; Guppy has always had that grand Victorian belief in the inalienable right of every man to the privacy of his own deepest emotions of love and of domesticity. But at least this can be said, that even if Guppy could have been what he is without the sustenance of domestic affection and unbroken conjugal and filial sympathy, he could never have continued to be what he is.

But to pick up the incident of Guppy's youth. There is a story that after leaving school, his first occupation was with a firm who made and distributed books ; characteristically, a firm whose primary concern was, in a mercantile but not a derogatory sense, with educational books, and, moreover, whose market was international and not at all the circulating library. But, still at an early age, he turned from the commerce of books to professional bibliophily, acting as Sub-Librarian to Sion College Library. What he saw there in miniature became the nuclear idea of the John Rylands Library. He perceived how a library, independent of the vagaries of municipal politics, could be at one and the same time a cell of specialist scholarship and a centre of wide human culture. His appointment to the John Rylands Library in 1899, before the Library was officially opened, gave him his opportunity. He saw how chance had made it possible for a theological repository to become a bibliographical microcosm of all the liberal arts. The Althorp sale opened unmeasurable vistas as the proper and necessary development of what was at first conceived as a storehouse of Biblical lore. Theology could be persuaded to embrace the Humanities ; and, Lucina Guppy, their offspring was the John Rylands Library. Guppy realised how auspicious the birth was. His own character is essentially religious, religious in the non-doctrinal way which is often called Nonconformist, the Victorian variety of religious temper which is the mainspring of Browning's poetry. Its aim is to gather the richest of the enduring things of life for the service of God. And Guppy guided the growth of the John Rylands Library in this secular archiepiscopal fashion, archbishop *in partibus*, may

be, but *omnium litterarum humaniorum*. Now, no European conclave of librarians is complete without him.

Even the Gothic architecture of the building, its external shape, and its internal detail, is in some sort his own outer garment, his proper chasuble and his stole. The most solemn of its regular ceremonies is the ritual when the Librarian reaches from its shelf in the Bible-room the 42-line Bible to lay it before an entranced novice or to place it in the hands of some foreign pundit visiting the shrine. The whole man is in the service and in the ceremony; it symbolises him and the Library. Moreover, Guppy endows the more, and even the most, secular of his professional activities in his daily task with similar solemn graciousness of form. One would like to see him in the act of signing a cheque. His notepaper, even his postcards, are emblems fit for the imprint they bear; and the script, which with his own hand he imposes on them, is a characteristic mark of his personal identification with his charge. There are, of course, typewriters in the Library; but what it is Guppy's own office to perform, he performs with his own hand.

But it would be wrong to think even for a moment that Guppy has built this sanctuary of learning, and then barricaded it and himself against the outer world. There is an astute business man somewhere inside Henry Guppy. When he looks in on Quaritch or Sotheran, one would give much to see the novel sides of his genius undreamed of by those to whom he is the officiating minister in Deansgate. He has not only a flair for discovery: he has a way of securing what will be acclaimed as *desiderata*, though he himself first guessed them and their kind to be things worth any great library's having. By tact, by astuteness, by native alertness and by no less native honesty, and, when the situation calls, by blandishment, he enriches the Library's shelves by adding another precious item to them, incorporating another considerable collection, or, looking to remoter fields, by devising a bibliomath's voyage of discovery. He allures donors to liberality, he inspires colleagues with zest for the chase, he makes booksellers feel a sense of the duty they owe to the John Rylands Library. To train their scent, he regularly excites his assistants to hunt amongst the cellars and the barrows

towards Shude-hill. As Chairman of the Book Committee, I am often thrilled to find in the accounts which I initial for payment a slip in the hand of one of our assistants in the Library—6d. for this or that sixteenth-century pamphlet, or 2s. 6d. for a rare though tattered-looking volume, say by Richard Baxter (and any Baxter not in the Rylands is a very rare book), items smelled out in some dingy book cellar within a mile of Manchester's Royal Exchange. Only a historian can tell with the proper awe the story of how, dropping into the room of Quaritch's managing director, Guppy saw a manuscript lying on the table, and by instinct rather than by historical knowledge felt that it ought to be bought. He gave £250 for it and found he had secured for the John Rylands the earliest extant copy of the *Laws of Henry I*, a manuscript which one of our greatest constitutional mediævalists rhapsodically declares to be of primary importance.

But these exercises of Guppy's uncanny flair are legion. On one occasion he came by an Aldine Latin *Horæ* printed on vellum in 1529, one not only unknown to Renouard, but categorically denied existence by him. It is in the John Rylands now; and it cost only £100. Nowadays, indeed, Guppy's smelling sense is so widely known that Mahomet has not always to go out to the mountain. The mountain is acquiring a habit of coming to him. A year or two ago, for instance, a rich lot of Johnsoniana in manuscript was first offered to Guppy.

There clearly is the astute business man in Guppy. But the arts of business only reach part of his business. The biggest bulk of Rylands' additions in our generation have been by donation or by bequests. By the help which freely and unselfishly he has given to them, and by the confidence he engenders in them, Guppy makes friends with the private and the amateur book-collector. In due course there are transfers from their shelves to ours. Dr. Lloyd Roberts and Dr. Thomas Windsor, twenty years ago, and Dr. Larmuth, the other day, would not have bequeathed their precious volumes to a mere book-emporium. They willingly left their treasures to Guppy's Library. Once more, it is the same story; it is Guppy the man who is the secret of Guppy the Librarian.

But it is time now, as far as a mere scholar and an amateur

book-lover can do so, to try to say what specifically are the professional qualities which are sprung from Guppy's natural genius. Nothing further need be said about their guiding spirit, Guppy's passionate devotion to all that counts for the good of the John Rylands Library. But what one now wants to diagnose are the specifically professional schemes which have been his policy and his technique. By a nice adjustment of idealistic and realistic projects, he has planned the growth of the Library not as an increasing number of volumes, but as an extending series of collections. He has allowed opportunity its run in prompting his choice, just as the chance of the Althorp sale determined the groundwork. But he has taken opportunity in the Greek way. It comprises not only the chance possibilities of acquisition; it also implies an eye for the opportune. Collections, as distinct from accumulations, need the guiding mind of experts in their gathering, and after that, the devotion of experts to their scholarly interpretation. Guppy saw that Manchester University was securing a place in the learned world, and that Mediæval History, under Tout's regime (to name only the honoured dead), was making Manchester a cynosure of Europe's academies. So Guppy set out to make the John Rylands a sort of provincial and special Record Office, bringing to it mediæval muniments to gratify a scholar's dream. When the major academic activities of the University and its facilities for research did not happen to reach into those other fields of learning already represented in the Library, Guppy himself planned a personnel to seek out and bring home whatever might extend the scholarly value of the nucleus already in Manchester. So Rendel Harris and Alphonse Mingana became voyaging Orientalists, searching for papyri and other manuscript relics which could illuminate the history of the Bible and the early stages of the Christian faith. This thrust to the East was impelled not only by thought of the Founders' religious purpose, but by the possession of the Crawford Oriental MSS. The system started, the method of growth by grouped acquisitions has spread widely. Again, the Crawford Napoleonic Proclamations are a typical example. Always, although Guppy has been willing to secure any particular volume for a lone student, he has

urged users of the Library to submit comprehensive lists of *desiderata*. In that way he has made the Library a resort of world-wide scholarship, and an almost self-contained museum for scholars.

But Guppy has never been satisfied merely to provide material for the learned. Like the Library's founder, he has been fervently alive to missionary and philanthropic motives. The Library is a world-renowned bibliophile's museum. But it is not only that. It has always been meant by Guppy to be an instrument of broad and democratic culture. Hence, from the early days, he has not only recruited seekers of books, but he has sought the co-operation of public expositors of them. He secured the part or full-time service of all kinds of experts who might make the contents of the Rylands rarities available to the world—cataloguers as distinguished as Montague James and Hunt, and expositors as alluring as Rendel Harris, Tout and Conway. Widening the social and geographical limits of this dissemination, he instituted the Rylands Lectures. Perhaps the idea of them in their present form first came from his own habit, in his early Manchester years, of gathering together in the Rylands or elsewhere groups of working men to bring before them (in the good Ruskin-Rowley-Victorian fashion) the riches on their doorstep. At the Lectures, now for some twenty years formally established, half a dozen times a year there come together a roomful of relatively local devotees of the particular branch of learning represented in the topic of that day's lecture. Again, to overcome the topographical restriction of a universal institution, Guppy planned and inaugurated the RYLANDS BULLETIN. In this, scholars throughout the world find papers on more or less abstruse matters to the knowledge of which the Rylands Library can add something from its storehouse. Even more missionary in spirit are the Exhibitions which Guppy arranges to let Lancashire see something of the world's heirlooms now housed in its midst. He has made the Library a dwelling-place of the scholarship which seeks to serve humanity by ministering not only to its intellectual but to its spiritual needs.

His own scholarship is wide, but appropriately it is chiefly bibliographical. He knows every swaddling-clout wrapping the



world's incunabula, talks of Gutenberg, Sweynheym and Pannartz as most Mancunians discuss Ranji and Trumper and Spooner ; and the Venetian press of Aldus or the Westminster shops of Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde he knows as intimately as we know the *Manchester Guardian* or the Calico Printers' Association. His professional and private proclivities have probably come nearest together in his surveys of translations of the Bible prior to the great Authorised Version — a congenial field for a bibliographical scholar and a professed nonconformist.

Naturally, Manchester has had first claim on Guppy's service. But, like his Library, Guppy is known in all parts of the world where books are revered. The BULLETIN goes over the seven seas ; and by a system of international exchange, largely instigated by Guppy, appropriate Rylands publications are regularly sent forth and bring corresponding items from the five continents.

Learning, that is, real learning, and not dictator nostrums, knows neither racial barriers nor political frontiers. In one signal way Guppy showed his appreciation of this cosmopolitanism of scholarship. It was Guppy who initiated and organised the collection, in England and America, of the books which went to restore the Library of Louvain, when the Vandals had made their first attack on it in the last war. His act was publicly recognised as a primary contribution to the restoration of civilisation in Europe. May he soon be planning other such re-establishments of wisdom and of culture !

But how inadequate is all this catalogue of traits, methods, and achievements, to give a real sense of the real Guppy. No one can feel that more despondently than do I—for, for thirty years, I have leaned on his science and his friendship. One can only repeat ; in Guppy, man and Librarian are of one piece, the genial sentiment of the man blends richly and humanely with the proper form of the Librarian. Perhaps the most symbolic of all occasions in which this unified duality shows itself is at a Governors' meeting. Necessary and formal business over, the Librarian reports across the table on whatever has seemed noteworthy in the last few weeks. He reads a letter of thanks from Tokio or California or Madrid from some scholar grateful for a reference or for a photostat. He mentions the offer of this

or that book or manuscript, or he reports a visit to such and such an estate where he has been given first choice from the library ; he draws attention to a recent sale where such and such a volume fetched £500 and then points to a book on the table, adding ' that is our copy, vastly more perfect than the one in the sale '. Or there may have been a distinguished visitor. One will never forget his account of King Fuad's amazement to discover a Koran more magnificent than even he had ever seen. It is at moments like these, the privilege of its Governors, that all who know the John Rylands Library may see and feel how much the Library is to Guppy and why Guppy has been so much to the Library.