

# THE JUBILEE OF THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY.<sup>1</sup>

By H. B. CHARLTON, M.A., D. DE D., LITT. D.

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER.

**F**IFTY years ago to the very day, on the 6th October, 1899, the John Rylands Library was formally dedicated to the use of the public. The event was one of the three or four signal acts by which nineteenth-century Manchester claimed and justified its rights in the world of culture, rights no less considerable than those it had previously won for itself in the realms of industry, commerce, and politics. Charles Hallé settled in Manchester in 1849; John Owens's bequest enabled Owens College to be set up in 1851; C. P. Scott became editor of the *Manchester Guardian* in 1872; and in 1899 the widow of John Rylands founded and endowed the John Rylands Library as a memorial to her husband. These are not fortuitous and unrelated occurrences. The Hallé Orchestra, the University of Manchester, the *Manchester Guardian* and the Rylands Library are symbols of the spirit which was the soul of nineteenth-century Manchester. Each in its own way is the outcome of the cultural aspirations of a distinctive society, the wealthy merchants and manufacturers of cottonopolis, those indigenous Lancastrians and those many merchant settlers from the Continent who brought to their adopted city a way of the intellectual and artistic life which admirably tempered the native austerity of a predominantly Puritan body.

The Manchester Man of the nineteenth century played his part in shaping the mind of to-day. One such man was John Rylands. He was almost the perfect example of the type. Yet it was as a memorial to him that his widow built in the heart of Manchester a library which finds no room at all on its shelves for books on pure or applied science nor on those practical arts

<sup>1</sup> A broadcast of the 6th of October, the substance of which was given as a lecture in the John Rylands Library on the 12th of October, 1949.

and affairs of industry and commerce which are commonly taken to symbolise the life of Manchester. His outstanding aptitude was for business ; he believed in hard work and long hours of it, in thrift and self-help ; he believed also in Cobden and Bright and in what Liberals called progress through independence : and he believed in the God of the Protestant Bible as it was expounded by Free Church theologians. His main intellectual interest was in religion, particularly in biblical studies and Nonconformist doctrine ; his private hobby was the planning of acts of benevolence in such a way that their performance was as unobtrusive as possible. He was born in 1801, the son of a cotton goods manufacturer of St. Helens. On leaving school he started a small weaving concern on his own account ; later he took his elder brothers and his father into partnership, and set up in 1819 the firm of Rylands and Sons in Wigan where they manufactured ginghams, dowlases, calicoes and linen. He did the travelling for the firm, and established a warehouse in Manchester in 1823. The business grew rapidly, extending its interests to dyeworks, and bleaching, and spinning : in addition, rich deposits of coal were discovered under some of the firm's newly acquired properties. His brothers retired in 1839, and in 1847 his father died, leaving John the sole proprietor of the concern. He opened a warehouse in London, and in 1873 converted the business into a limited company with a capital of £2,000,000. He married three times ; his six children by his first wife pre-deceased him ; he had no others. He married his third wife when he was 74 : it was she who on his death in 1888 determined to build the Library as a worthy memorial to him. Had any of John Rylands' children survived, or had he not at the ripe age of 74 married for the third time, there might have been no Rylands Library.

A library seemed her obvious choice for the memorial. Though John Rylands would never take part in organised philanthropies, he had given largely throughout his lifetime ; he had established orphanages, and homes for aged gentlewomen ; he provided a town hall, public baths, and a library for Stretford, the town adjacent to Manchester wherein stood his residence, Longford Hall. But the benevolence which was a day to day

habit with him was directed to the intellectual help of poor Free Church ministers. He regularly presented books to them so that they could keep abreast of current thought and opinion. He also accumulated at Longford Hall a collection of books which seemed to him particularly suitable for the intellectual and cultural needs of ministers of religion. He had himself employed scholars to prepare special editions of the Bible which he then had printed and distributed freely. It was natural, therefore, that his widow should think a library the most appropriate memorial, a library predominantly theological in character, though not exclusively theological in content nor narrowly theological in range.

Such was the scheme. In 1889 the designing of a building had been entrusted to Basil Champneys. It was to be in the heart of mercantile Manchester, so as to be most easily accessible to its clients. But it had not to look mercantile. Its style was to be something between that of a college and of a church, a building the components of which could not inappropriately be called aisles, or apses, or cloisters. Modern Gothic is perhaps not an obviously suitable style for Manchester's Deansgate. Moreover, a building like the Rylands, to be seen at all, needs a surrounding belt of unoccupied space. Still, whatever may be said aesthetically about its style and its location, as a building it is a tribute to the craft of the masons, the sculptors, the metal-workers and the wood-carvers who shared in the making of it. It has solidity, dignity and solemnity : in an accountancy sense, it was well worth the quarter of a million which Mrs. Rylands spent in the building of it.

The stonemasons began to build in 1890. But, in 1892, years before the structure could be completed, the nature of the collection of books it was meant to house was changed by a happy circumstance. A great, and predominantly humanist, collection of books, Lord Spencer's Althorp Library, came into the market and was bought by Mrs. Rylands for another quarter of a million pounds. It was certain therefore that the future John Rylands Library would be at least as strong in its humanist as in its theological interests. Whilst work on the building was in progress, Mrs. Rylands, acting on the advice of such scholars

as Dr. Fairburn, Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford, was collecting wisely and lavishly. She also in 1899 appointed the man who for nearly fifty years was to direct the Library's progress, Henry Guppy. He had been sub-librarian to a Free Church library, that of Sion College, and came to Manchester at first to share responsibility with the well-known bibliographer Gordon Duff; but in a very short time, he became sole librarian and continued as Rylands Librarian until his death last year. The building was ready for the service of the public shortly after Guppy's arrival; it was officially opened on the 6th October and, very appropriately, by Dr. Fairburn.

The quality of the Library as it now is, and the specific function it seeks to fulfil have been determined through the last fifty years largely by three factors. First, the nature of the initial collection; secondly, the constitutional arrangements for government, and particularly the active governorship of such University representatives as Tout the historian and Peake the Biblical scholar; and thirdly, the personality of the late librarian Henry Guppy.

As has been said, the Library was intended as a working Library for theological students. The first purchases, however, naturally included many secular English classics. But the cultural extension of the Library's function was revolutionised by the acquisition of the 40,000 volume Althorp Collection, one of the most famous private libraries in the world. This had been brought together by successive Earls Spencer—though mainly by the second Earl, who had inherited from his father 5000 volumes gathered by an Eton schoolmaster and containing a fair number of Elizabethan items. After succeeding to the Earldom, the second Earl's determination to be a great collector had fuller opportunity. In 1790 he added to his own stock the whole of the library of a Hungarian nobleman, Count Reviczky, whose travels and diplomatic appointments had made him known to scholars, dilettanti and cognoscenti throughout Europe. The Reviczky Collection was particularly noteworthy for its handsome copies of the first printed editions of the Greek and Latin Classics, and for its examples of the finer work of the scholar-printers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries such as

Aldus, Stephanus, Morel and Turnebus, and of the de luxe printers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such as Baskerville, Foulis and Tonson. Here, then, in the Reviczky Collection, was a repository comprising well-nigh everything that survives in letters of the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome: and Lord Spencer acquired it for £1000 down and an annuity of £500 a year. As Reviczky died only three years after the transaction, the Library cost Earl Spencer £2500. Its present value cannot be less than £1,000,000. Lord Spencer's plans for the development of his Althorp Library were largely determined by his incorporation in it of the Reviczky books. He would, of course, replace, where possible, a Reviczky example with a cleaner copy. He would endeavour to find copies of a first or of very early editions of classical authors which had eluded Reviczky's search. There is, for example, an amusing story of how he beguiled the King of Würtemberg to accept a number of theological items in exchange for two very rare and early editions of Virgil. Further, finding that his editions of the classics provided him with work of the earliest printers, Lord Spencer turned to collecting examples of the earliest works of the presses of Europe, whether editions of classical writers or not. In that way, inevitably, he became possessed of a large number of Bibles, for, except in England, the Bible was in early demand from the press. Further still, this interest in the earliest products of the earliest presses of Europe naturally suggested the gathering of the Caxtons and Wynkyn de Worde's of our own belatedly-born first English presses. We have now sixty-three Caxtons, six of them unique copies.

When in time the Althorp was brought to the Rylands, the Rylands inevitably became a resort for three main trends of scholarship. First, its contents were primary material for the prosecution of the technical science of bibliography, comprising the study of incunabula (books, that is, produced before 1500 when printing was still in swaddling clouts), of processes of typography and of binding, and the technique of description, classification and collation. Secondly, as the content of the bulk of the collection was classical, here was the main material

for the literary exploration of Humanism in its ancient, its medieval and its renaissance kinds. Thirdly, both with the classical books and especially with the Biblical texts, here was primary material for strictly textual study and exegesis.

But the Rylands, like all great libraries is not only a repository of books. As early as 1901 Mrs. Rylands acquired for it at a cost of £200,000 a famous collection of MSS., 6000 items, from the Bibliotheca Lindesiana gathered by many generations of Earls of Crawford in the preceding four centuries. It contained, of course, many Latin MSS., including examples of first-class quality from most of the great schools of medieval Europe: but its great feature was its collection of sumptuous examples of Persian and Arabic calligraphy, and Chinese graphic art. When incorporated in the Rylands, it could not but prompt further activities in the study of palaeography and calligraphy: it suggested also the building of an equivalent body of Western manuscripts, as well as the linking of our Oriental collection with the Biblical collections already in the Library.

Such then, is the stock and the potentialities with which the Rylands Library started. A further factor which strongly influenced the particular direction of development was the constitutional relationship of the governors with the University of Manchester. In itself this guaranteed that however much the Rylands would be prized as a bibliophilic museum, its major activity would be as a working library for scholars, and mainly for scholars in Biblical, medieval and neo-humanist fields. Though its almost unique collection of classical authors is one of its glories, these volumes seem to have excited the bibliographer more than the strict classical scholar, and the humanist outcome from them has been mainly transferred to medieval and modern literary fields; perhaps because side by side with Homer and Virgil in the Italian incunabula there was bound to be Dante and Petrarch and Boccaccio. The development of the Biblical and the medieval potentialities has been more spectacular and more direct. The stock of printed Bibles has been increased, and most strikingly in 1936 when Mrs. Hartland presented the 2000 Bibles which formed the Copinger Collec-

tion. But it is rather by its manuscript additions that the imagination has been most stirred. It became usual to appoint as Keepers of Western and of Oriental MSS., persons eager to discover fresh material in the field. Rendel Harris and Mingana are names which spring to mind; and they often worked in conjunction with scholars like Grenfell and Hunt. Amongst the papyri which came to Manchester in this way, were discovered two unique Biblical items—a fragment of Deuteronomy written in the second century B.C. and therefore competing with the recently discovered Dead Sea scrolls as the earliest known manuscript of the Old Testament; and a very small fragment of the Gospel of St John, dating from the second century A.D., and therefore the earliest known fragment of the New Testament.

It was, however, the medieval side of the Library's evolving function which showed the most productive results in scholarship. And it was almost entirely due to a governor, who in due course was Chairman of Governors, the late Professor T. F. Tout. He had come to the Chair of Medieval History at Manchester University in 1890, and had devoted himself to the building up of a research school of medieval studies. By a scholar's interest and an administrator's genius he guided the extension of the Rylands Collection of medieval manuscripts, always with an eye for those which, when interpreted, would increase our knowledge of the Middle Ages. In the course of time, besides the national documents assembled, there was gathered in the Library's Charter Room a large collection of deeds, charters, rolls and allied papers. The Library has also from very early years been an approved repository for archives: and in its custody are extensive series of family papers such as the Mainwaring MSS., the Jodrell MSS., the Tatton MSS., and, most complete of all, the collection of Lindsay-Crawford papers, namely, the Haigh Muniments and the Scottish Muniments.

In attempting, as we have done, to follow the growth of the Library, there is one further formative power to reckon with—namely, Henry Guppy, librarian for forty-nine years. Without being a scholar in the traditional sense, he was learned in the science of bibliography and expert in the typographical history of the English Bible. But his personality dominated the whole place:

it is hardly an exaggeration to say that he created the Library. By temperament and conviction he shared John Rylands' belief in the Free Churches, and in the part a library could play in enhancing the intellectual and spiritual forces which make for the Christian life. He regarded his librarianship as a kind of secular priesthood, and the Library itself as in a special way under the particular protection of Providence. In that faith he fought against the Governors' desire to remove its treasures out of the reach of bomb and fire during the war : it was only after the property abutting on the building on both sides of it had been gutted by air-raid damage that he consented to co-operate with Providence and find safe hiding in remoter areas for the Library's rarities. His abiding object was to make the Library of use to those for whom John Rylands had intended it. He instituted the Rylands Lectures, an annual programme of discourses given in the Library by chosen lecturers on topics in some way related to the treasures of the Library. He edited, too, a Bulletin, which now appears twice yearly, and which reprints the Lectures given in the Library, and other pieces of scholarship connected with our collections. Whilst developing this missionary side of the Library's usefulness, Guppy never forgot its primary function, to serve the needs of research, whether the research of a distinguished European scholar or the first attempts of a young graduate.

In this brief survey of the makers and shapers of the Library one other person must be named by name—the late Lord Crawford and Balcarres. Himself a survivor of the fast-disappearing bibliophilic nobility, like-minded with the Spencers and the Reviczky's whose collections now enrich ours, he acted for many years as a Trustee of the Rylands, keeping a watchful eye on ways and means for fostering its development. On its twenty-fifth anniversary, he handed to it a collection of 20,000 tracts drawn from the period of the French Revolution. His son, the present Earl, has recently deposited, on semi-permanent loan, some half-dozen other collections of this kind of primary material for literary and historical research : he has done so to ensure that, although many of the riches of the Bibliotheca Lindesiana are to be dispersed, large sections of it which are



mainly the material from which the story of the past must be unrolled may be kept together and placed at the disposal of scholars.

So much for the Rylands to-day as it ends its fiftieth year. What of its future? Mrs. Rylands endowed it with a capital of £300,000, bringing her total outlay for building, special collections, and endowment to over £1,000,000. It had long been hoped that a second benefactor of like munificence to Mrs. Rylands might appear and extend the structure of the Library: and the mere growth of the stock will very quickly make considerable structural extension not only desirable but absolutely necessary. Moreover, within the boundary of cultural interests with which it is associated, fresh fields of material from time to time emerge: a new hoard of papyri, the dispersal of a baronial collection and so on. But it appears now that the day is gone when men would and could perpetuate their names by large memorial endowments: Rylands can hardly hope to find a Nuffield to follow. Even more disturbing is the fact that, in the world of to-day, what once was a handsome income is now inadequate to meet the routine expenses of the day. Hence, for mere maintenance and quite apart from large-scale development, the Rylands must find additional resources on which to live. Perhaps, as it is undoubtedly a national institution, and one, moreover which, if not unique, has fewer than half-a-dozen parallels in Britain, it may look for some sort of subsidy from public funds, so long as such subsidy does not invade the autonomy of the Library.

As it is unlikely that resources will ever again be available for the purchase of exhibition-pieces, such as illuminated manuscripts, for instance, or jewelled bindings, the Library must develop to the full its function as a scholar's working library. It must increase its stock, not by unique museum pieces of fabulous worth, but by photographic or photostatic or microfilm reproduction of such items. It must develop its own equipment, already highly efficient, for the making of reproductions by these processes, and for the using of those made elsewhere, so that all that the Rylands has and all that other libraries have may be available to scholars in and around

Manchester. In the main, the material which in this way would be made available would be what scholars call 'original sources'. For English scholars, the great stand-by for these is the British Museum in London, and the usefulness of the British Museum from this point of view is greatly enhanced by its rights under the English Copyright Act. To establish copyright in a book, a publisher must deposit a copy on the day of publication in a specified number of libraries, the chief of which is the British Museum. So, all British publications are to be found at the British Museum. But why should a Lancashire man have to go to London to see them? Why should not a Manchester library be a 'copyright' library, automatically receiving gratis a copy of every book published? Clearly, all sorts of problems are behind this question. To receive a book involves a trust to keep it; and that necessitates huge storage reservoirs; moreover, a library like the Rylands is only concerned with certain ranges of books, and, at most, would seek a selective right to receive only such books as fall within its scope of interests. But to be assured of receipt, without charge, of all new books within the scope of that interest, would be an enormous boon to a library with a shrinking income. Why should not Manchester inherit the 'copyright' privilege which, presumably, Dublin will now resign or forfeit?