

**NOTES ON THE
BRIDGEWATER
HOUSE LIBRARY**

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THE BRIDGEWATER HOUSE LIBRARY



WHEN it became known that Mr. Henry E. Huntington had purchased the Bridgewater House Library, it was not generally realized what a precious addition he had made to his already unrivalled collection of early English literature. Although Payne Collier had catalogued it and Carew Hazlitt had ranked it with the Britwell and Huth collections in quality and importance, the fame of the Bridgewater Library had been in the shadow for some years. References to it in the literature of collecting and bibliophily are strangely sparse and fragmentary, and tantalizing in their incompleteness. A full, descriptive account of the Library as a whole is greatly to be desired, and it is to be hoped that some one with access to the sources will eventually prepare such an account. Meantime, some of the scattered facts available to everyone are here brought together as a partial answer to the ques-

tions: What is the Bridgewater collection? Who formed it? and Where is it now?—questions which have been of frequent occurrence lately.

The collection derives its name from the titles borne by its original owners, members of the Egerton family, who, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were successively Earls and Dukes of Bridgewater. Early in the nineteenth century these titles lapsed, and much of the vast Bridgewater property, including the library, passed to a branch of the family whose chief representative was created Earl of Ellesmere, in 1846. Bridgewater House, a beautiful structure designed by Sir Charles Barry, the architect of the present Houses of Parliament, is the London residence of the Earls of Ellesmere and is situated in Cleveland Row, near the Green Park, to the south of Piccadilly.

The founder of the Bridgewater Library was Sir Thomas Egerton (1540?–1617), a natural son of Sir Richard Egerton of Ridley, in Cheshire, by one Alice Sparke. Educated at Oxford, he prepared for the bar at Lincoln's Inn, and in the course of his long and honorable career he attained the highest

offices and honors of his profession. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth he filled the important posts of attorney-general, solicitor-general, master of the rolls, and lord keeper of the great seal. Upon the accession of King James the First, Egerton was appointed lord high chancellor of England, and elevated to the peerage as Baron Ellesmere. On November 7, 1616, he was advanced to the dignity of Viscount Brackley.

Egerton's public position and duties brought him into constant and intimate relations with the literary men of his time, particularly the poets and dramatists. As a consequence his name is frequently met with in the poetry of the period, and in numerous dedicatory epistles, sonnets, and epigrams. Amongst others, Ben Jonson wrote three epigrams in his honor. In his *Timber*, Jonson described Egerton as "a grave and great orator, and best when he was provoked." Among the works of Samuel Daniel is *An Original Letter . . . sent to Lord Keeper Egerton with a present of his Works newly augmented*, 1601, extant in the *Bridgewater Library*. Daniel also composed an epistle in verse

in honor of the lord keeper in which the latter is addressed as:

“Great Keeper of the state of Equity,
Refuge of mercy, upon whom relies
The succour of oppressed misery;
Altar of safegard, whereto affliction flies
From th' eager pursuit of severity;
Haven of peace that labour'st to withdraw
Justice from out the tempests of the Law.”

John Davies of Hereford dedicated his *Summa Totalis. . . or an Addition to Mirum in Modum*, London, 1607, to Lord and Lady Ellesmere in a laudatory sonnet, and the presentation copy contains a number of manuscript changes and additions in Davies' own hand. Sir John Davies, author of *Nosce Teipsum*, dedicated his *Orchestra* to Egerton. The dedicatory sonnet is in manuscript in the Bridgewater copy, and is not printed in the ordinary edition. Egerton's "consideration for deserving young barristers is illustrated by the invariable kindness which he showed to Francis Bacon, who acknowledged his 'fatherly care' when writing of him in 1596. In 1606, Egerton worked hard to

secure the attorney-generalship for Bacon, but although he met with no success, his openly displayed patronage was of assistance to Bacon at the Bar."

An incident of high literary interest associated with the lord keeper's career was the visit of Queen Elizabeth to his house at Harefield, July 31-August 3, 1602. As was customary on the occasion of such royal visits, an elaborate programme of entertainment was carried out with great pomp and pageantry throughout the four days. The event that marks the royal visit as a memorable one in literary history was the first recorded performance of Shakespeare's *Othello* by "Burbidges players," who, with Shakespeare himself almost certainly amongst them, had been specially brought down from London to give the play before the Queen.

Everywhere in the literature of the time evidence is found that his contemporaries looked upon Sir Thomas Egerton as a generous, appreciative and discriminating lover of learning and patron of letters. It was, therefore, quite natural that he
