

**THE WESTERN MANUSCRIPTS
OF THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY,
HELPS FOR STUDENTS OF
HISTORY, NO. 43**

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The western manuscripts of the Bodleian library, Helps for students of history, No. 43 by H. H. E. Craster

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H. H. E. CRASTER

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**THE WESTERN MANUSCRIPTS OF
THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY**

HELPS FOR STUDENTS OF HISTORY. No. 78

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THE
WESTERN MANUSCRIPTS
OF THE
BODLEIAN LIBRARY

BY

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FELLOW OF ALL SOULS
AND SUB-LIBRARIAN OF THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY

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CONTENTS

HISTORY OF THE LIBRARY - - - -	7
METHODS OF CLASSIFICATION - - - -	18
CATALOGUES - - - - -	24
CLASSES OF MANUSCRIPTS - - - - -	34

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

THE WESTERN MANUSCRIPTS OF THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY

HISTORY OF THE LIBRARY.

THE Bodleian Library is the lineal successor of a library first founded about 1320 by Thomas Cobham, Bishop of Worcester. Cobham's Library occupied a chamber attached to the University church (St. Mary's). It received between the years 1435 and 1446 some three hundred MSS., by gift from that royal prince and patron of learning, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. The good Duke Humphrey also contributed money for the erection of the Divinity School (begun shortly after 1444 and completed about 1480). A room built over that school was set apart for the purposes of a new library. Thither the Duke's MSS. and the other books acquired by the University were removed in 1488 from the crowded little room in St. Mary's. Their new abode was what now forms the central alley of the Old

8 THE WESTERN MANUSCRIPTS

Reading-Room of the Bodleian—its present name, "Duke Humphrey," perpetuating the name of the fifteenth-century donor.

The Reformation, which brought about the destruction of our monastic libraries, also robbed Oxford of its books. In 1550 the King's Commissioners visited the University Library, dispersed or destroyed its contents as heretical, and left the chamber so bare that six years later the University thought good to dismantle it of its empty bookcases. So Oxford remained without a public library for upwards of half a century, until, in 1598, the Vice-Chancellor received an offer from Sir Thomas Bodley to restore the library at his own cost.

Bodley, whose name has since become a synonym for the University Library, was a former Fellow of Merton College who had spent the greater part of his life in diplomatic service under Queen Elizabeth. He fitted up the desolate room which had once housed Duke Humphrey's books, procured benefactions of books from influential friends, and presented his new foundation with an endowment. Work was sufficiently far advanced for the Library to be formally opened on November 8, 1602.

Duke Humphrey's Library had naturally been a collection of manuscripts; although some printed books may have found their way into it in the

first half of the sixteenth century, we have no evidence on that point. But Bodley's Library was primarily a storehouse of printed literature. When it was first opened to the public it contained over two thousand volumes, and no more than three hundred of these were manuscript. Some eighty of these (among them the Leofric Missal) came from the Exeter Cathedral Library by gift of the Dean and Chapter. Other early donors of famous manuscripts were Thomas Allen, of Gloucester Hall; Sir Robert Cotton, the founder of the Cottonian Collection; and in all probability Sir Thomas Bodley himself.

An institution with the limited financial resources of Bodley's Library is bound to rely on benefaction rather than on purchase for its development. The Bodleian owes its position among the libraries of the world less to its size than to the value of the manuscript collections with which successive benefactors have endowed it. First in point of date was the Barocci Collection, a series of 242 Greek manuscripts, presented in 1629 by the Chancellor of the University, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, who had bought them from the library of Giacomo Barocci, a Venetian gentleman. Five years later another important collection, mainly of English provenance and rich in early scientific works, came by gift from Sir Kenelm Digby. But both these benefactions