



THE UPPER HALL OF THE SIGNET LIBRARY, EDINBURGH.

# The Signet Library, Edinburgh

BY

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THE Society of Writers to His Majesty's Signet is an ancient and honourable body of Scots lawyers. Its members are now ordinarily employed as conveyancers, as agents practising in the Court of Session, as factors on landed estates, and as family men of business. They have, however, a traditional connection with the functions of Government. The King's signet is, and has been—certainly since the fourteenth century, probably much longer—one of the Royal Seals of Scotland. It was in the charge of the King's Secretary, and the earlier Writers to the Signet were the clerks of the Secretary's office. Their primary duty was to conduct the public and private correspondence of the Sovereign. In time this was extended to the preparation of all warrants for charters or grants to be passed under the Great Seal or the Privy Seal, such warrants being known as 'signatures' because they bore the signet of the King. In later times the clerks to the Signet signed summonses and other writs pertaining to the supreme court of justice. All such documents ran in the form of letters from the King. Signatures were addressed to the Chancellor or Lord Privy Seal, summonses to officers of the law. Such writs were authenticated by the Signet, and it became the exclusive privilege of the Writers to the Signet to prepare or sign them. The privilege of signing them still endures, though it is now little more than a formality.

Writers to the Signet hold office under commission from the Keeper of the Signet, who is also Lord Clerk Register of Scotland, and one of the great Officers of State. The Keeper appoints from among the members of the Society a Deputy-Keeper and a body of Commissioners, by whom the Society's affairs are administered.

The Society has played no small part in the life of Scotland—political, social, and intellectual.

Its history has been given to the world in a stately volume, *A History of the Society of Writers to Her Majesty's Signet* (Edinburgh, 1890). One notes among the early members the name of Walter Chepman, the founder of Scottish printing. Here, however, we are only concerned with the Society in its capacity as owner of one of the finest libraries in Scotland, certainly the finest which is maintained entirely out of private funds.

The Signet Library was founded a hundred and eighty-three years ago. On November 12, 1722, the Society ordered that all the Scots law-books, and the Acts of Parliament passed before and after the Union, should be procured, and that to these should be added all future publications of the same kind as they appeared. In those days all the Scots law-books in print were some sixty volumes. (They have increased since!) The books lay in the Signet Office, then located in Writers' Court. Some works on English law were soon added. There were at first no regular funds set apart for the Library; both the purchase and the custody of the books seem to have been in the hands of the Treasurer of the Society. The Library fund originated in 1755, in the following quaint manner:—

'3rd February 1755.—The Keeper and Commissioners, taking into their consideration the inconveniency and unnecessary expenses of entertainments commonly given by intrants upon their admission into the Society, do hereby enact and ordain that every intrant who shall give any entertainment whatever upon his admission, shall forfeit and pay ten pounds sterling to the poor of the Society; and that in consideration of this expense being saved to the intrants, each intrant in time to come shall pay three guineas, to be applied for purchasing books for the use of the Society; and further enact that every clerk to the signet who shall go to any such entertainment, shall also pay five guineas to be applied for purchasing books as aforesaid.'

It is curious to note that a similar attempt to

suppress 'the bad custom of intrants ther maiking feastes' had been made in the Faculty of Advocates more than sixty years earlier, delinquents being similarly mulcted for the benefit of the Library.

In 1769 the tax was raised to £10. From 1787 the whole sum was paid by apprentices to the profession on first entering into their indentures. For many years this tax produced an average return of £400 a year.

In 1740 a proposal was made that the Writers to the Signet should be granted all the privileges of members of the Bar with regard to the Library of the Faculty of Advocates, the great historic collection which has been described in a recent article (*Books and Book-Plates*, October 1904). The Society offered to contribute proportionally to the maintenance of the Library. Various negotiations took place between the two bodies, but the project came to nothing.

The need for something more than a law library was now becoming strongly felt, and in 1778 it was at last resolved to form a general library on a large scale. Two curators, soon increased to five, were appointed, with powers to purchase books. Many valuable donations were made by members of the Society and their friends. In 1782 the books were removed from the Signet Office to a new library room, which was soon filled to overflowing. By 1792 there were some 3000 volumes. No official librarian was appointed till some time after this, but in 1794 it was resolved that the charge of the books should in the meantime be committed to Mr. John Cameron, 'who for a considerable time past had managed the library.' Cameron was probably the compiler of the first catalogue, which was printed in 1792.

A characteristic of the Library has been the formation, from an early date in its history, of a fine collection of the great sources of historical study. The Library as it stood in 1800 is thus described by Mr. T. G. Law in the Society's *History*:—

'The great European collections and works of research were already on the shelves. There were 132 volumes of the *Académie des Sciences*, 114 of the *Acta Eruditorum Lipsiae*; Muratori's collection of Italian historians, the *Histoire littéraire de France*, the 30 folios of the Byzantine

historians; the great collections of antiquities by Grævius, Gronovius and Ugolini, and Gruter's Roman inscriptions. Ecclesiastical history was represented by the annals of Baronius, the works of Beausobre, Basnage, Tillemont, and Mosheim; Hebrew literature and criticism by Walton's polyglot, the *Critici Sacri*, Surenhusius's *Mischna*, and the works of Bochart. There were also Kennicott's Hebrew Bible, the *Codex Alexandrinus* of the Greek Testament, Origen's *Hexapla*, and the *Patres Apostolici* of Cotelerius. In French literature there were the works of Montaigne, Corneille, Molière, Racine, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Crébillon; in Italian, Machiavelli, Metastasio, Tasso, and Dante. But although there were Hebrew, Russian, Spanish, and Italian Bibles, there was no copy of the English version; and while English poetry was represented by Milton and Pope, there was no edition of Shakespeare; and, what is perhaps more strange, none of Sir David Lindsay. In light literature the Society was content with Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and his *Sentimental Journey*. In voyages and travels, now a strong feature of the Library, readers were limited to the collections of Hakluyt, Harris, and Prévost. The groundwork of the present rich collection of British topography was already laid by the acquisition of some good county histories.

'The collection as a whole was certainly miscellaneous; and, while the departments of learning were unequally represented, in none was there an approach to completeness. The works were, however, not ill-chosen, if regarded as specimens of each class,—solid blocks of literature placed here and there to mark the line of the foundations upon which it was intended to raise the superstructure.'

About the beginning of the nineteenth century the Library seems to have fallen into a very neglected state. In 1804 a committee of four was appointed to report on its condition. Mr. George Sandy, who had passed W.S. in 1798, was a member of the committee, and devoted much time and labour to re-arranging and re-cataloguing the books. His catalogue was printed in 1805.

The prosperity of the Library, however, dates from the appointment of Mr. Macvey Napier as librarian, in 1805. The Society has been singularly fortunate in its librarians, the office

having been successively filled by such men as Mr. Napier, Mr. David Laing, and the late Mr. T. G. Law. Macvey Napier had been admitted as a W.S. in 1799, but had devoted himself rather to literature than to professional work. In 1805, the year of his appointment to the Library, he contributed his first article to the *Edinburgh Review*, to which he became a regular contributor. In 1814 he undertook to edit for Constable a Supplement to the sixth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, which was ultimately completed in six volumes in 1824. In that year he became the first Professor of Conveyancing in the University of Edinburgh. After Constable's bankruptcy and death in 1827, the property in the *Encyclopædia* was acquired by Adam Black. Napier was continued as editor, and the seventh edition, in twenty-two volumes, was completed under his direction in 1842. In 1829 he succeeded Jeffrey as editor of the *Edinburgh Review*. It was no easy task to drive a team which included Brougham and Macaulay, but Napier performed the duty with conspicuous tact and judgment, and the *Review*, while perhaps less important politically than in Jeffrey's time, was never better as regards literary merit than under his editorship. In 1837 he was appointed one of the Principal Clerks of Session, and resigned the librarianship after thirty-two years' service. He died in 1847.

It was Napier who made the Library as we now know it. During his years of office 'he was,' writes Mr. Law, 'the life and soul of every enterprise in connection with the Library.' 'His extensive knowledge of books,' says the same writer elsewhere, 'which the variety of his own literary pursuits compelled him to keep well up to date, admirably fitted him for the selection of the best works on every requisite subject.' His learning and enthusiasm were fully appreciated by the Society, from which he received the most enlightened and munificent support. Between 1808 and 1814 the annual expenditure on books and bindings rose from £450 to £632. In 1815 the curators recognised that this was 'not nearly adequate to the double purpose of supplying the many deficiencies in useful literature and the new publications of interest.' The average expenditure for the next seven years rose to £1155 for books alone. In 1824 the sum so spent was £1994, 12s. 3d. The policy of the Curators

was embodied in the instructions given to the Librarian in 1826, that it was his duty 'to attend to the selection and purchase of books, not merely the publications of the day, but all the works in the various departments of learning, ancient and modern, proper for the formation of a general library on an extensive scale.' 'As an example,' says the *History*, 'of the liberal manner in which this principle was put in practice, it may be noticed that in 1832, at a meeting of the Curators, it was, on the suggestion of the Librarian, unanimously resolved to purchase the *Cabinet du Roi* for £120, and *Humboldt's Voyages* for £160.'

Between 1805 and 1825 it was reckoned that the number of books had risen from 6000 to 30,000.

When tendering his resignation to the curators in 1837, Mr. Napier wrote concerning the Library:—

'I found it a small, yet viewed with reference to its contents a valuable, collection, for it had been formed chiefly by three members of the body possessing great zeal and intelligence, and no inconsiderable literary attainments and reputation, viz. Mr. John Davidson, Mr. William Tytler, and Mr. David Erskine. It has been by following their example in procuring books, the possession of which lends lustre to a library, and in filling up systematically the blanks in those departments more specially interesting to a Society like ours—an object which the ample funds for many years placed at my disposal enabled me to accomplish—that I now leave it one of the choicest and most valuable repositories of learning this part of the island possesses. No one can ever again witness or aid in such changes in its progress as have occurred during the last thirty years—changes which, from an obscure, murky, and dangerous neighbourhood, have placed it prominently in the public eye, in apartments every way worthy of a great Society, and which form one of the ornaments of this beautiful city.'

The years of Napier's reign witnessed a great change in the material surroundings of the Library. As we have seen, the books were at first deposited in the old Signet Office in Writers' Court. As early as 1778, when the general library was started, proposals were made for the acquisition of a proper hall and library-room. The matter was taken up by Mr. Walter Scott,

W.S., Sir Walter's father, and other prominent members of the Society. In 1782 the Society bought the flat above the Signet Office, and in the following year an adjoining flat. Here the Library remained for thirty-three years.

The new premises were soon found inadequate, both for the Library and for the Society's meetings, and from time to time proposals were made for the acquisition of better quarters. In 1808 trustees were appointed by Act of Parliament (48 Geo. III., c. 146) for the purpose of erecting

a sum of over £10,000, the interest of which, with the future expenses of the Library, were provided for by raising the tax on apprentices from £20 to £50.

The Society obtained possession of its new premises in 1815. The Library now rapidly expanded, thanks to Mr. Napier's zeal and the Society's munificence, and by 1825 was again much in want of space. The upper part of the new building had been allotted to the Advocates' Library, which had been sorely cramped in its



NUREMBERG CHRONICLE, 1493—BUILDING OF THE ARK.

buildings in connection with the Parliament House for the better accommodation of the Courts and for other purposes, one of which was the accommodation of the Advocates' Library. The trustees were further empowered to consider the claims of other public bodies to accommodation in the new buildings. The Writers to the Signet decided to open negotiations with the trustees, and ultimately it was arranged that they should be accommodated in the lower part of the new buildings, facing Parliament Square. They contributed to the cost of the new buildings

old quarters in the Laigh Parliament House, and the Faculty of Advocates had built and furnished a splendid pillared hall—one of the finest rooms in Edinburgh. A notable feature of its decoration is the painted dome, executed by Thomas Stothard in 1822. The design represents Apollo and the Muses, surrounded by orators, poets, historians, and philosophers. The ancients are represented by Demosthenes and Cicero, Herodotus and Livy, and the moderns by Hume, Robertson, Gibbon, Newton, Bacon, Napier of Merchiston, and Adam Smith. In the group of

poets, Homer occupies the centre, with Shakespeare and Burns on his right, and Milton and Virgil on his left. In 1826 the Advocates, who were building large new premises to the south-west of the Parliament House, sold this fine room to the W.S. Society. They remained for seven years longer as the Society's tenants. In 1833 the Society obtained possession of the hall, and since that time its Library has enjoyed ideal accommodation, both as regards convenience and

On Macvey Napier's resignation in 1837 he was succeeded as librarian by Mr. David Laing, the most famous of Scottish antiquaries. He was the son of William Laing, bookseller in Edinburgh, to whom he became apprenticed in his fourteenth year. He early made the acquaintance of John Gibson Lockhart, who, in *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, describes him as 'by far the most genuine specimen of a true old-fashioned bibliophile that I ever saw exhibited in the person



**S**odoma et Gomorra atque civitates alie ob neptarij peccati vindictam a domino phibent successe. solo loth eius duobus filiabus ac vxore liberato. cum omnibus aduersariis contumeliam faciebant. pro deo uniuersam regionem simul exterminare fecit. Cum enim abraham esset nonaginta annorum accepit legem circumcisiois recepit etiam reprobationem de ysaac nascituro. Eodem quoque tempore venientibus sero duobus angelis versus sodomam. loth phibentem atque benedictum sedes in foribus civitatis ad invitandum pauperes. quibus visus occurrit rogans et cogens eos ut declinarerint in domum suam cum sero esset. Qui ingressi domum eius. omnes populus sodomorum circumdederunt domum loth dicentes ut produceret eis illos iuvenes intendentes abuti eis. loth autem obtulit eis duas filias suas virginis ad vitendum eis ne illis inuicem hospitio receptis tale iniuriam facerent. Qui nolentes audire. sed quasi rupes ostium. sed angelus introduxerunt loth in domum. et illos omnes percusserunt cecitate. ut ostium inuenire non possent. produceruntque angelus subterfugione sodomam egressi. Et cum nunciasset loth generis suis contempserunt. demum duxerunt angelus loth vxorem et duas filias eius de civitate. precipientes ut in monte se saluas facerent. nec retro aspicerent. pugnans autem cum vxore respexisset retro. sed angelorum preceptum et citatam curam habere videns. visa sunt in statu salis. pluitque de super sodomam et gomoram et alias civitates iane et sulbur tandem sterneret sunt et visa est regio in lacum salinum et sterilem in mare mortuum. *Alcedoniam autem*

NUREMBERG CHRONICLE, 1493—LOT FLEEING FROM SODOM.

amenity. A large addition, completed last year (1904), has provided space for the expansion of the Library for another generation at least.

Dr. Dibdin, the famous bibliographer, visited Edinburgh in 1837. In his *Northern Tour* he gives a characteristically effusive description of a visit to the Signet Library. 'It will always have pleasing reminiscences for me,' he concludes, 'for a more friendly and gratifying hour was never spent in any library than that which I spent here in company with its late distinguished Librarian.'

of a young man,' and speaks of his 'truly wonderful degree of skill and knowledge in all departments of bibliography.' He became Secretary of the Bannatyne Club on its institution in 1822, and in 1824 was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, of which he was for many years Foreign Secretary. In 1821 he became a partner in his father's business, and he now devoted himself to the work of editing old Scottish texts. A mere enumeration of the works edited by him would fill several pages; it may suffice to note *Dunbar's Poems* (1834), the

*Jacobite Correspondence of the Athole Family*, 1745-6 (1834), the *Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, 1637-62 (1835), Row's *History of the Kirk of Scotland* (1841), and his most important work, *The Collected Works of John Knox*, issued in six volumes by the Wodrow Society (1846-64).

Laing remained Librarian for forty-one years. Unfortunately the years of his librarianship were a time of unusual depression in the funds of the W.S. Society, and expenditure on the library had to be seriously curtailed. Thus from 1867 to 1877 the average annual amount spent on books and binding was only £298, as against an annual average of £1500 for the years from 1823 to 1833. But Laing's vast knowledge of books, especially of books connected with Scottish history and literature, made him a wonderful bargain-hunter, and he made many choice additions to the library. He was always ready to put his bibliographical knowledge at the service of all inquirers, and under him the library became a great centre of research. 'Sitting in that fine Signet Library, of which he holds the keys,' wrote Professor Cosmo Innes, 'he is consulted by everybody in every emergency. No wise man will undertake a literary work on Scotland without taking counsel with Mr. Laing.' He died in 1878. He had increased the library to 70,000 volumes.

David Laing was succeeded by one whose personality is yet fresh in the memory of all in Edinburgh who are concerned with history or letters—the late Mr. Thomas Graves Law. Mr. Law's training had been very different from that of his predecessor. Educated as a Roman Catholic, he had been for more than twenty years a member of the congregation of the Oratorian Fathers at Brompton. There, while devoting himself to the active duties of a priest, he found his chief interest in historical and critical research. While at the Oratory he prepared a catalogue of its library, and undertook the arrangement of a valuable collection of sixteenth century MSS. belonging to Cardinal Manning. In 1878 he left the Church of Rome. In March 1879, chiefly through the influence of Mr. Gladstone, he was appointed to the Signet Library.

This is not the place in which to speak of Mr. Law's contributions to Biblical criticism and to ecclesiastical history and biography, but

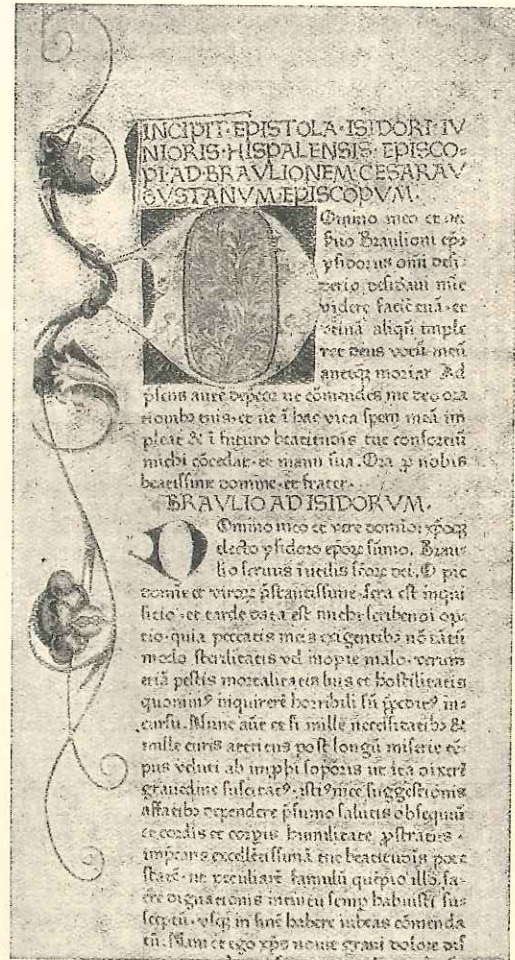
reference must be made to the memorable services which he rendered to Scottish historical research as secretary of the Scottish History Society. The Society was founded in 1886, on the suggestion of Lord Rosebery, for the publication of unprinted materials connected with the national history. The older book-clubs had garnered, it was thought, all the best of the crop, and the Society was content to adopt the modest motto, *Colligite fragmenta, ne pereant*. The splendid series of volumes issued by the Society tells the story of its success. In connection with it Mr. Law showed himself the true successor of David Laing. Professor Hume Brown writes: 'In association with Professor Masson and Bishop Dowden, Mr. Law threw himself enthusiastically into the work of founding the Society, and pledged his interest in its future by accepting the post of Honorary Secretary. When he undertook the duties of the post he perhaps hardly realised the amount of labour it would entail. He conceived these duties, indeed, in the most exacting sense; not content with his strictly secretarial work, he virtually made himself co-editor of the successive publications of the Society. For seventeen years Mr. Law was engaged in what was emphatically a labour of love—on the constant watch for materials for the Society's publications, and sparing no pains to present them to the world in worthy form. From the beginning it was realised by the members of the Society that its success was mainly due to his ability, tact, and enthusiasm, and in 1903 they gave substantial proof of their recognition of his services by presenting him with a silver bowl and a purse of two hundred guineas. In making the presentation Lord Rosebery expressed with his usual felicity the collective feeling of the Society: "There is not a person here," he said, "and there is not a person conversant with the work of this Society outside who does not know the deep debt, the eternal debt of gratitude we owe to our Secretary, Mr. Law, who has been the life and soul of the Society. He has acquired documents, he has superintended their printing, he has weeded the documents he has chosen, and from day to day and from hour to hour, all through the years the Society has existed, Mr. Law has been its moving spirit." From first to

last, forty-four volumes were issued by the Society under Mr. Law's supervision—a monumental contribution to the materials of Scottish history with which his name will ever be honourably associated.' In 1898 the University of Edinburgh made him an LL.D. Two other works of his may be noted—the admirable outline of the history of Mary Stuart, written, almost on his deathbed, for the *Cambridge Modern History*, and—what is more to our present purpose—the chapter on the Signet Library in the *History of the Society of Writers to the Signet*.

For many years the library and its librarian were so intimately associated with the Scottish History Society that no apology need be made for what may appear a digression. But the library was Mr. Law's first care always. On his appointment the Curators formulated the principle that 'the funds of the Society should be applied to procuring such books as are absolutely necessary for a public library, such as systematic treatises useful for reference and consultation, and particularly those books on history, philosophy, the arts and sciences, of an expensive description, which are not generally to be found in private libraries.' Mention has been made of the catalogue of the library prepared by Mr. George Sandy, W.S., and printed in 1805. For many years this remained the only catalogue. Supplements were printed in 1820, 1826, and 1833. In the last-mentioned year the original catalogue was recast and issued uniform with the supplements, the whole thus forming a catalogue in four independent parts, running through four separate alphabets. To remedy this inconvenience a general index to the whole was projected by Mr. Shiells, one of the assistant librarians. This was completed and printed in 1837, and was found of great practical value as a subject-index to the library. In 1849 the Society authorised a grant of £150 a year towards the expenses of preparing and printing a new general catalogue. The catalogue was completed in manuscript by the end of 1855. The first sheets were sent to the press in 1865, and the first volume was issued in 1871. The second, with a supplement, was issued under Mr. Law's direction in 1883. A slip-catalogue was made of a collection of 20,000 pamphlets which had not been entered in the general catalogue.

A general subject-index to the contents of the library, based on the index prepared by Mr. Shiells, was made by Mr. Law and issued as a quarto volume in 1891.

Mr. Law died on March 12, 1904, *multis bonis febilis*. He has been succeeded by Mr. J. P. Edmond, formerly librarian to the Earl of Crawford at Haigh Hall, and well known to



PART OF PAGE FROM ISIDORUS HISPALENSIS,  
c. 1472.

bibliographers as the author of *Aberdeen Printers* (which Mr. Gordon Duff brackets with Blades's *Life of Caxton* as the two best monographs we possess) and as joint author with Dr. Robert Dickson of the monumental *Annals of Scottish Printing*. Once more the Writers to the Signet have been fortunate in their choice of a librarian.

The Library now contains some 110,000 volumes. It is maintained, as it was founded, for the practical purposes of a most practical profession, and is therefore rather a good modern



law and general library than a collection of bibliophile's treasures. It contains no manuscripts of importance. There are, however, a considerable number of valuable and interesting early printed books. A few may be noted here.

The *Nova Compilatio Decretalium* of Pope Gregory IX. Printed by Nicolas Jenson at Venice in 1475. Folio. On vellum, with coloured initials throughout. A magnificent example of Jenson's always beautiful work.

Plutarch, *Virorum illustrium Vitæ*. Jenson, Venice, 1478. 2 vols. folio.

*Rei Rusticæ Scriptores* (Cato, Varro, Columella, etc.). *Editio princeps*. Jenson, Venice, 1472. Folio. Slightly stained, but on the whole in fine condition.

The *Constitutiones* of Clement v., printed by Peter Schoeffer of Gernsheim at Mainz in 1471. A thin folio, in Gothic letter. Illuminated first page, and many coloured initials added by hand.

Hartman Schedel's *Liber Chronicarum in figuris et imaginibus ab initio mundi*. The famous *Nuremberg Chronicle*, perhaps the best known of all mediæval books, printed by Anton Koburger at Nuremberg in 1493. It sets forth the whole history of the world from the Creation to the Day of Judgment. It contains 1809 pictures (including many 'repeats'). Many of the designs are now attributed to Michael Wohlgemuth, the master of Dürer. As one turns the pages one can see the world through the eyes of the Middle Ages—the eyes of a wondering child. Two of the illustrations are reproduced at pages 4 and 5.

Bernardus de Breydenbach's *Sanctorum Peregrinationum in Montem Syon ad venerandi Christi Sepulcrum in Hierusalem, etc., Opusculum*. Printed by Peter Drach at Speyer, 1490. Breydenbach was a German ecclesiastic, Dean of the Cathedral of Mainz, who in 1482 undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. On his return he published this account of his travels. It contains some interesting folding plates (seldom found in such good condition as in this copy), not only of the holy places in Palestine but of Venice, Rhodes, Candia, etc., and much practical information for pilgrims. There is a paragraph, doubtless the result of a trying experience: *De cautela contra pediculos ac pulices et muscas in mari!*

Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum Libri XX*.

No place or date, but known to be printed at Strasburg by Mentelin about 1472. Folio. A good example of an early printed book decorated with initials in gold and colours. A portion of the first page is reproduced at page 7.

Dionysius Halicarnassensis, *Origines sive Antiquitates Romanæ*. Printed at Treviso by Bernardinus Celerius de Luere, 1480. Folio. A clean copy in a fine modern binding.

Boccaccio's *De Genealogia Deorum* (Bâle, 1532, folio), *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* and *De preclaris Mulieribus*. The two last are bound in one volume. They are beautiful books, with many coloured initials added by hand. Neither of them has the place, printer's name, or date, but Hain in his *Repertorium Bibliographicum* assigns them to George Husner of Strasburg, about the year 1473.

Priscianus, *Opera Grammatica*. Rome, Ulric Han, circa 1470. A beautiful piece of early Roman printing.

Orosius. The first edition, printed at Augsburg by John Schussler, 1471.

*Catonis Magni Ethica, seu Disticha de Moribus*. Anthony Sorg, Augsburg, 1475. Somewhat injured by damp.

Rodericus Sancius, Bishop of Zamora in Spain. *Speculum Humanæ Vitæ*. Printed at Paris by Martin Crantz, 1475.

Diogenes Laertius, *Vitæ Philosophorum*. Printed by Jenson at Venice in 1475. Koburger's Nuremberg editions of the same author are also in the Library.

Gualterus Burlæus, *Vitæ Philosophorum*. Printed by Frederick Creusner at Nuremberg in 1479. There are also in the Library two early undated editions of the same book, one attributed to the press of Koburger.

Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*. Venice, Vind. de Spira, 1471.

Trapezuntius, *Rhetoricorum Libri V*. Printed by Spira at Venice about 1472.

Juvenal, Lactantius, and Diodorus Siculus. The Venetian editions of 1472-74.

*Dialogus Creaturarum*. Printed by Conrad de Homborch at Cologne, 1481. 4to. The *Dialogus* is a collection of stories, chiefly of animals, with appropriate morals added. The authorship remains doubtful, but it is now believed to have been written by Mayno de' Mayneri, a physician

at the Court of Milan in the middle of the fourteenth century. It was one of the most popular books of the Middle Ages.

Petrarch, *Opera Latina*. Joh. de Amerbach, Bâle, 1496. Folio.

Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Troiana*. Strasbourg, 1494. By an unknown printer, usually styled 'Printer of the 1483 Jordanus de Quedlinburg.' This copy is believed to have belonged to Clement Marot. It was in the library of Sir William Hamilton, who gave it to Mr. W. B. D. D. Turnbull, by whom it was presented to the Library.

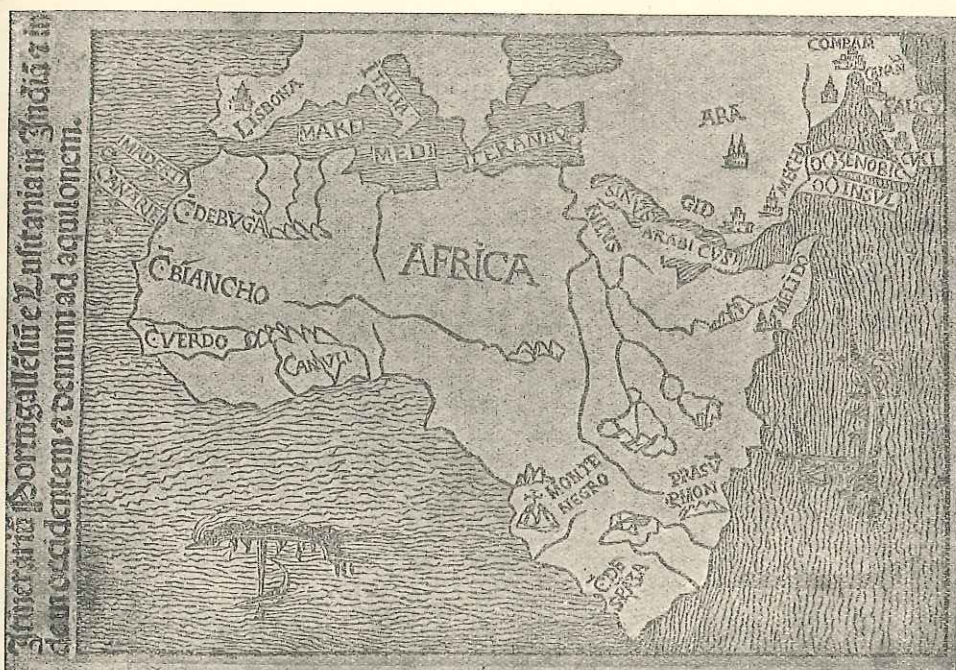
Archangelus Madrignanus, *Itinerarium Portu-*

Lord Berners's *Froissart*. Printed at London by W. Myddylton and R. Pynson, 1525. Two vols., folio.

Homer, with the Commentaries of Eustathius. The fine Roman edition of 1542-50, in 4 volumes, folio. In good modern binding, and in beautiful condition.

Conradus Lycosthenes, *Prodigiorum ac ostentorum Chronicon*. Bâle, 1557. A collection of marvels and monsters,

'cannibals that each other eat,  
The anthropophagi, and men whose heads  
Do grow beneath their shoulders,'



MAP OF AFRICA, FROM ARCHANGELUS MADRIGNANUS, 1508.

*gallensium e Lusitania in Indiam, et inde in Occidentem, et demum ad Aquilonem*. Milan, 1508. Folio. This volume contains an early map of Africa, reproduced above.

Joannes Salesburiensis, *Policraticus, de Nugis Curialium et Vestigiis Philosophorum*. Paris, 1513. 8vo.

The Aldine Greek Bible of 1518.

Ptolemy's *Opus Geographiæ*. The Strasburg edition of 1522, containing the well-known map of the British Islands.

*Polycronicon*. Printed by Peter Treveris, London, 1527. The English translation of the universal history written by Ranulph Higden, a monk of Chester, in the fourteenth century.

with many illustrations—a delightful book of bogies. One of the marvels recorded is Hector Boece's story of the Hebridean geese which are born from trees. A woodcut is given representing this remarkable process of Nature. It is reproduced at page 13.

*Missale Romanum*. The Paris Missal of 1588, with coloured title-page and armorial frontispiece.

Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Both the edition of 1577-78 and that of 1586-87.

Saxton's *Maps of the Counties of England*. London, 1579. A perfect copy of this rare atlas of Elizabethan England.

De Bry's *Collectiones Peregrinationum*. The great illustrated collection of voyages to the Indies, printed at Frankfort in 1590 and the following years.

*Ane Detectioun of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes, touchand the murder of hir husband, and hir conspiracie, adulterie, and pretended marriage with the Erle Bothwell, etc.* Translatit out of the Latine quhilke was written by G. B. (George Buchanan). London, 1572. 12-mo. Printed anonymously by John Day.

Among the productions of the early Scottish Press may be noted :—

Archbishop Hamilton's *Catechism*. Printed by John Scott at St. Andrews in 1552. This is one of the rarest of Scottish books; only about a dozen copies are known to exist. A facsimile reprint was published in 1882, and in 1884 an edition was issued by the Clarendon Press with a preface by Mr. Gladstone and an introduction by Mr. T. G. Law. Fol. xci and the title-page are here reproduced.

Bellenden's *Hystory and Croniklis of Scotland*. Printed by Thomas Davidson about 1542, described by Messrs. Dickson and Edmond as 'an almost unrivalled specimen of early British typography . . . one of those gems which the earlier period of the art so frequently produced, but which no future efforts of the Press have

surpassed or even equalled.' This volume contains a remarkable woodcut, *Imago Crucifixi sedentis ad iudicium*, which is reproduced at page 12. The following description of its symbolism is quoted by Messrs. Dickson and Edmond from Herbert's edition of Ames's *Typographical Antiquities* :—

'The *Imago Crucifixi* is within a circle of roses, having here and there a cross interspersed; the interior part consists of four divisions; in the middle of the uppermost is represented God the Father crowned and irradiated, invested with an imperial robe, holding up His right hand, and a mund in His left. At His right hand is the Virgin crowned, and holding on her arm the child Jesus irradiated. At His left hand is an angel in a posture of adoration, with the holy dove irradiated between them. Christ Jesus crowned with thorns and nailed on the cross, at full length, divides the three lower partitions in the midst. In the second division appear Moses, David, and the prophets on His right

hand; the apostles and evangelists on His left. In the third, on the right, a Child sitting and holding up a sword; behind Him some holy martyrs or pilgrims, the foremost of them bearing three wafers upon a book; on the left a pope, with his ecclesiastical hierarchy. In the lower division, virgins on the right, matrons and

of the ten commandis. Fol. xci.  
 Our Declaratioun of the ten commandis, gouth  
 to us be almyghty God, to quhome be ge-  
 uynal louing and thankis, honour and  
 gloze for euer and euer, Amen.  
 G E H



HAMILTON'S CATECHISM, FOL. XCI.

confessors on the left. All these, except children, appear at half-length. Without the circle, in the upper corner on the right, is a priest kneeling before the altar, on which is represented Christ rising from the tomb; in the opposite corner is an angel appearing to some holy person on his knees, drawing him, as it were, to him with four strings. At the bottom is a scene of purgatory, represented by a group of persons in flames, encompassed by rocks and mountains, in the middle; while two persons on each side, kneeling, with their beads, are supposed to be praying for them. Sprigs of roses are seen as springing out of several parts of the cross.

(I am indebted to the courtesy of Mr. Edmond for the loan of the blocks which appear on pages 10, 11, and 12.)

*The Confession of Faith, containing how the troubled man should seeke refuge at his God, etc.* Compiled by M. Henry Balnaves of Halhill, one of the Lords of Session and Counsell of Scotland. Printed at Edinburgh by Thomas Vautrollier, 1584. 12mo. An exceedingly rare book.

*Barbour's Life and Acts of the most Victorious Conqueror, Robert Bruce King of Scotland, and Blind Harry's Life and Acts of the most famous*

*and Valiant Champion, Syr William Wallace, Knight of Ellerslie, Maintainer of the Liberty of Scotland.* Both printed at Edinburgh by Andro Hart in 1620.

*Psalmes of David.* Printed at Edinburgh by the Heirs of Andrew Hart, Anno Dom. 1635.

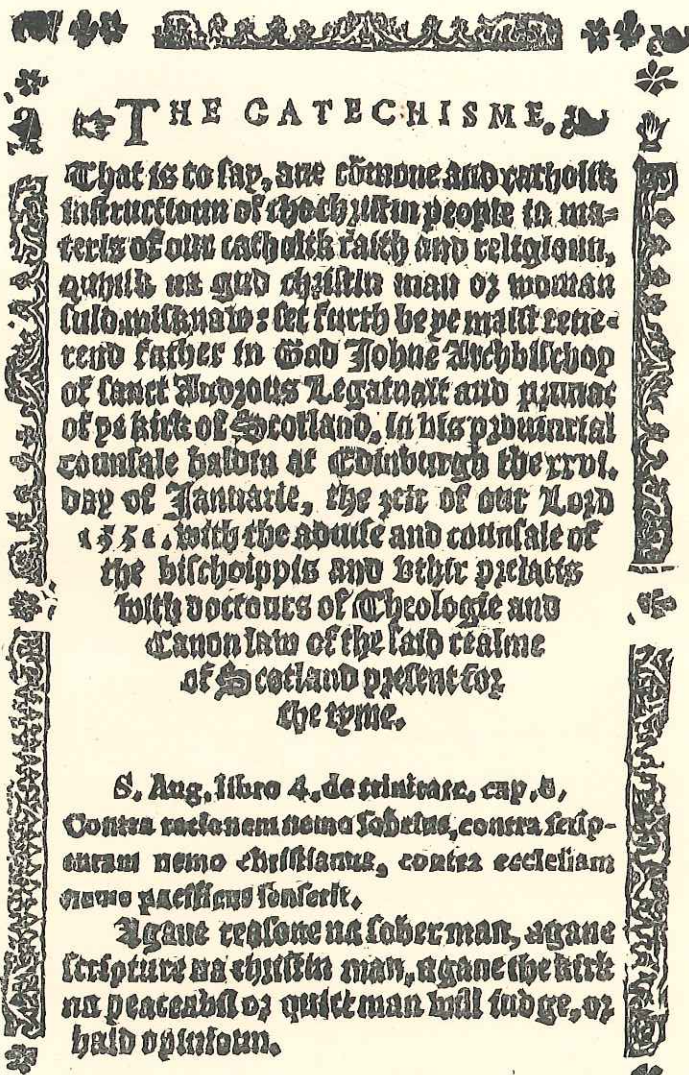
*Geographical Description of Scotland with the Faïres largely insert; as also, an exact Table of Tides, and the Table of the Latitude and Longitude of the most remarkable places in Scotland; with other useful notes fit for every man to know either on Sea or Land.* By James Paterson, Mathematician. Edinburgh, 1681. 12mo.

*The Whole 22 Yearly Faïres and Weekly Mercats of this Ancient Kingdom of Scotland.* Printed by John Forbes, Aberdeen, 1684. 12mo.

*Certamen Mathematicum, or A Mathematicall Dispute, Betwixt George Liddell, Student of Philosophy and Mathematicks into the Marischal Colledge of Aberdeen, and James Paterson (Mathematicus nomine tenus) in the*

*Cowgate of Edinburgh at the sign of the Cross-staff: Wherein George Liddel undertakes clearly to demonstrate and prove the said James Paterson to be grossly ignorant into all the Mathematicall Sciences.* Printed by John Forbes, Aberdeen, 1684.

A collection of very curious and rare Prognos-



TITLE-PAGE OF HAMILTON'S CATECHISM, 1552.

\* So much for the Stigmatisation!

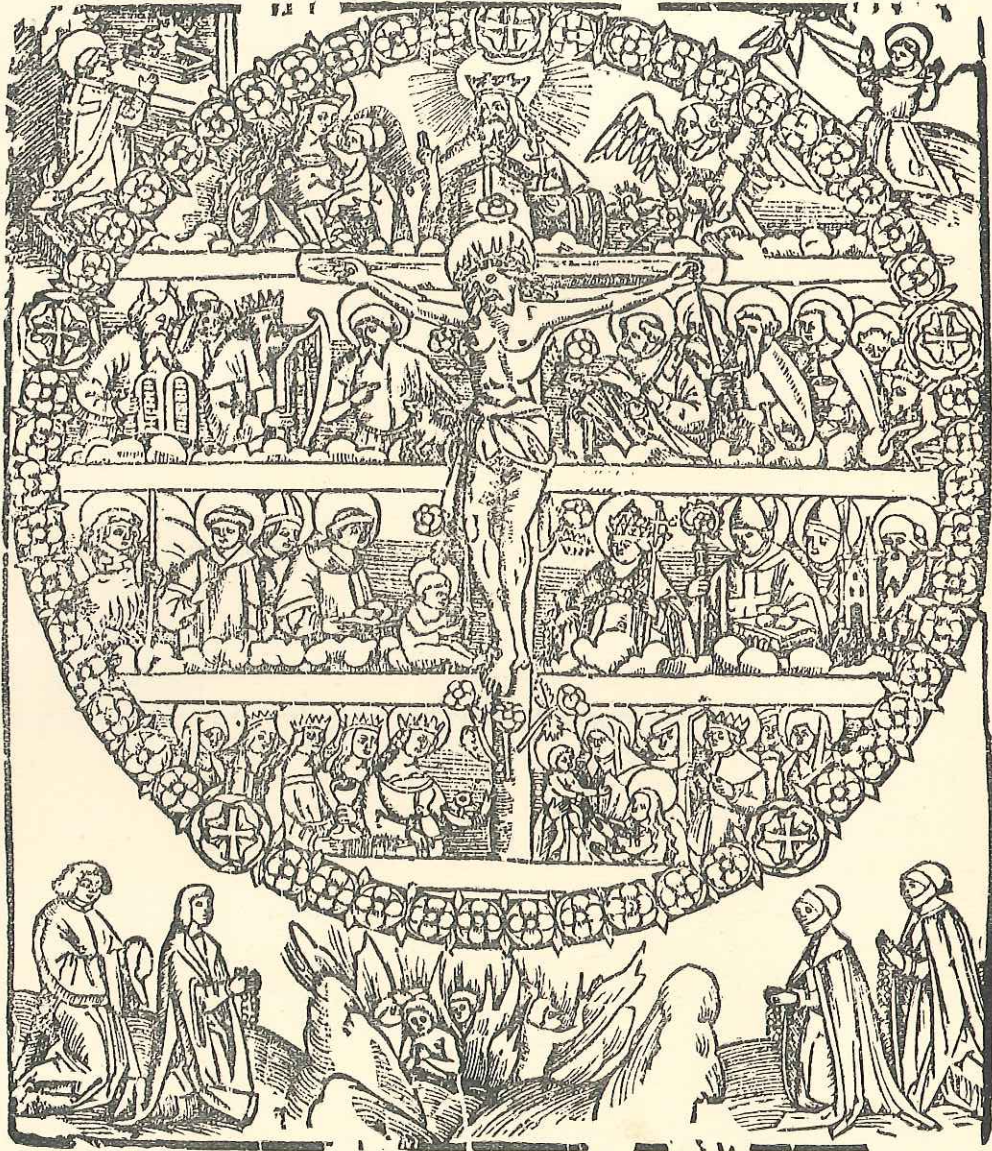
*tion Almanacks*, printed at Edinburgh and Aberdeen between 1680 and 1694.

The Library also contains a large collection of Royal Proclamations, Orders of Parliament, Acts of Assembly, etc., between 1640 and 1727.

A number of Foulis's and Baskerville's editions

Revolution the libraries of many noble houses were swept into the Bibliothèque Nationale.

The authorities there kept what they wanted and sold the remainder, so that in the early years of the nineteenth century many such volumes were in the market at moderate prices.



IMAGO CRUCIFIXI, FROM BELLENDEN'S *CRONIKLIS*, 1542.

of the classics may also be mentioned, including several of the latter's Birmingham quartos in fine bindings.

A notable feature of the Library is the number of books in French armorial bindings of the eighteenth century. At the time of the

Under the enlightened direction of Macvey Napier, not a few of these were acquired by the Signet Library. Such bindings are most enviable possessions, whatever their contents; in beauty of colour and delicacy of workmanship they have never been surpassed.

The purchase of good foreign books has always been a characteristic of the Library. Practical usefulness is naturally the first consideration, but beauty and historic interest have not been neglected in the past, and are not so now. For example, one of the latest additions to the Library is M. Claudin's magnificent *Histoire de l'Imprimerie en France au XV<sup>e</sup> et au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, now in course of publication.

One may quote in conclusion the words used by Mr. Law in closing his account of the Library in the Society's *History*: 'A library which ceases to grow soon becomes a collection of curiosities, interesting mainly to the antiquary. Old books are useful and profitable in proportion as they can be brought into contact with the newest and freshest, . . . but as the laudable

ambition and enterprise which have founded and enriched the collection show no sign of abatement, the Signet Library has yet a promising future, and this brief sketch tells but the first chapter of its history.'

Under its former librarians the Library has established a tradition of hospitality to all real students. That tradition is not likely to fail under their successor. To him, and to his ever-courteous assistants, I desire to express my thanks for the facilities and help which have rendered it possible to write this article.

I have also to thank Sir Charles Logan, late Deputy-Keeper of the Signet, for permission to photograph the Upper Hall and some illustrations from books in the Library.



HEBRIDEAN GEESE, FROM CONRADUS  
LYCOSTHENES, 1557.