

PRICELESS TREASURES OF LOUVAIN

In Louvain's famous library, for three centuries, valuable books and documents, both ancient and modern, have been accumulating (says the *New York Freeman*). Here have gathered students and scholars from all parts of the civilised world for study and research. For although the University of Louvain is a Catholic institution and since its founding, in the early 15th century, has placed great stress on its faculty of theology, it has nevertheless been one of the chief European centres for scholars of philology, classic literature, jurisprudence, and science. According to the latest available records, the library contained over 211,000 volumes, exclusive of periodicals and manuscripts. Among these are some of the rarest treasures of all Europe, not recent acquisitions like those of the famous libraries in the larger centres, but books and manuscripts which have been on the library shelves for centuries. For the public library of Louvain was established when the great libraries of Europe were few and very young. Padua, Jena, and Leipzig were the three chief centres for scholars of the late fifteenth century. The library at Louvain existed in scattered form before any of these.

The university was founded at the petition of John IV. of the House of Burgundy in 1425. A separate library sprang into existence with each new college that was added to the university, and in these were collected not only contemporary literature, but manuscripts dating as far back as the ninth century. Among the manuscripts held in special reverence was a series of sermons by Thomas a Kempis, the original version, in the author's own hand.

When the university administration finally decided to bring all these smaller libraries under one roof, their project was considerably furthered by the generosity of two eminent savants. Laurent Beyerlinck, long a scholar of the sciences and theology at Louvain, and afterwards Archbishop of Antwerp, bequeathed his valuable library of over 800 volumes. A few years later, according to an old chronicle in the library archives written in pompous Latin, Jacques Romain, son of Romain the mathematician, added his own library and that of his father, over 900 volumes in all.

In 1720 the Canon of Antwerp, Dominique Snaelerts, donated his entire library of 3500 volumes. These, with the gifts of Romain and Beyerlinck, form the body of the Louvain collection, which has, in all probability, been lost to the world.

Some of the rarest treasures which have, if reports be true, perished in the general destruction of the city, are the old manuscripts. Several of these go back nearly ten centuries. For example, one of the most famous of these is a small sheaf of songs, written by a monk in the ninth century, which has been the property of the library since its establishment.

Another set of thirty sermons by Thomas a Kempis is very rare. It is written partly on paper and partly on parchment, and came originally from the Abbey of St. Martin, near Louvain. Its genuineness is indisputable. Written across the first page in another hand is the statement that it was copied directly from the author's own manuscript, which was not itself dictated but in his own hand.

The manuscripts include many books of prayer, works of the holy Fathers, and valuable documents relating to early Church history.

A large and valuable part of the library is made up of the works of the world-renowned men who had held chairs in the university. The Renaissance brought forth many of them: Justus Lipsius, for instance. With Casaubon and Scaliger, this lovable, scholarly philologist formed the triumvirate of European Humanism, and his works found their first place on the library shelves. There were other famous professors at the university whose works enriched the rapidly grow-

ing collection: Rega, the authority of the eighteenth century on surgery; Clenard the Arbalist; Puteanus, the Humanist; Minckelen, the inventor of illuminating gas; and many others.

The library has always been a source of information for historians of Western Europe. Some of the manuscripts relating to the early history of Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Rhenish Provinces were of priceless value. The most famous of these, and one on which many modern historians have based their research, was the *Chronicle of Utrecht*, published about 1461. It belonged to a celebrated library, that of Offenbach, and had formerly belonged to a mysterious savant with the initials 'A.W.', whose original notes have proved most illuminating.

Another historical document was a series of notes on the early history of France, which was accidentally found a few years ago in a sheaf of old papers in the library archives, and which at the time of its discovery attracted widespread attention. There was also an exceedingly rare *Life of Charles I.*

Especially during the Renaissance Louvain was a centre for the study of the classics, as the manuscripts and precious old editions acquired at the time have indicated. When Louvain was at the zenith of its power princes and Popes vied with one another in granting it privileges and sending it additions for the library which should blazon forth the name of the donor. Charles V. was one of the chief donors of his time; his most important gift was a quaint and valuable old treatise, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*. The library had also an excellent *Book of the Hours*, a copy written on parchment in beautiful Gothic characters with elaborate illuminations and miniatures.

Christchurch North

November 23.

The Rev. Father Burger, S.M., proceeded to Rangiora to preach the occasional sermons at the Forty Hours' Adoration during Sunday and Monday.

The Rev. Fathers Kerley, S.M. (Temuka), McCarthy, S.M. (Maris: Missionary), Eccleton, S.M. (St. Patrick's College), and Richards (Hawarden), were guests of the Vicar-General, the Very Rev. Dean Hills, S.M., during the week.

The Rev. Father Hoare, S.M., returned from Timaru on Tuesday, where he had been relieving Rev. Father Goggin, S.M., who had undergone an operation at Lewisham Hospital. The operation proved successful and Father Goggin is now convalescent.

The arrangements in connection with the garden party, which is to be held in St. Mary's Presbytery grounds on Saturday afternoon, December 5, are well forward. The committee are most energetic in their efforts to make it a success, and by the number of tickets already disposed of the financial result should be very satisfactory.

The St. Mary's branch of the H.A.C.B. Society held their fortnightly meeting in Ozanam Lodge on Monday last, the president (Bro. Johnston) occupying the chair. There was a fair attendance. Several candidates were proposed for admission, whilst one was received by clearance. The position of secretary, which was vacant, was filled by the election of Bro. F. Wilson. The branch have received their regalia, and the officers are to be congratulated on its smart appearance.

At the music examinations held at St. Joseph's Convent, Waimate, on November 10 and 12, by the Royal Academy and Trinity College examiners, the following pupils of Miss Delahunt, L.A.B., L.T.C.L., were successful:—Intermediate, Nita Forbes; lower division, Kathleen Cooney, Eileen Cooney; primary, Cassie Lawlor, Hilda Cooney.

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