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NOVEMBER MEETING. (1909)

On Monday, November 15th, the President, Mr. Fortescue, in the Chair, a paper on
"THE LIBRARY OF ROBERT BURTON"
was read by Professor Osler.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL.—Nov. 15.—Mr. G. K. Fortescue in the chair.—Prof. Osler read a paper on 'The Library of Robert Burton.' "Fatally driven" (to use his own expression) upon his rock of melancholy, Robert Burton, to ease his mind and out of a fellow-feeling for others, composed his immortal work 'The Anatomy of Melancholy.' He calls it a patchwork laboriously collected out of divers writers; but if it is this, it is also a great medical treatise (the greatest ever written by a layman), orderly in arrangement, intensely serious in purpose, and weighty beyond belief with authorities. As he says, he had access to good libraries in the Bodleian and Christ Church; but for much of his learning he drew on the books in his own possession, though our information as to this is obscured by the numerous bequests in his will which permitted his friends to pick out individual volumes from his library at their pleasure. But the books which he bequeathed to the Bodleian and to Christ Church can be readily identified by his name or initials on their title-pages, and at Bodley 580, at Christ Church 429 volumes once in his ownership, have now been brought together, those at Christ Church being grouped round a copy of the original portrait of Burton at Brasenose.

Only a few of his books are annotated, and these chiefly with astrological memoranda. The most important part of the collection at the Bodleian is composed of seventeenth-century plays and pamphlets, the "baggage books" which Bodley thought might bring scandal were the library "stuffed" with them. Some of these may have been used for the third section of the 'Anatomy,' in which Burton examines all kinds of lore. There are only about 86 medical works among his known books, and none of these of great importance. The larger works had probably been selected by his friends under the terms of his will. No doubt for the same reason very few of his favourite English authors are at Bodley. Despite his saying that he was "by profession a Divine, by inclination a physician," more than half the survivors of Burton's books are theological, and from some of these he got a few details for his remarkable section on religious melancholy, in many respects the most original in his work.

Prof. Osler's lecture was illustrated with lantern-slides; and a complete set of the eight seventeenth-century editions of the 'Anatomy' was exhibited. Mr. Wheatley, Mr. Steele, Dr. Payne, Mr. Falconer Madan, Mr. Prideaux, and the President took part in the discussion.

~~the informal discourse on Burton before the Bibliographical Society was a~~

~~preliminary canter for the public address he was planning to give at New~~

Haven. In the Transactions of the Bibliographical Society for the year

there occurs the following note:

done

On Monday, November 15th, the President, Mr. Fortescue, in the Chair, a paper on "The Library of Robert Burton" was read by Professor Sir William Osler. It is hoped that this may be printed separately later on, with lists of Burton's books at the Bodleian Library and at Christ Church. Meanwhile the usual summary is here printed.

Summary. Migrating from Brasenose College to Christ Church, Robert Burton lived as he says 'a silent, sedentary, solitary, private life,' and 'fatally driven' (to use his own expression) upon the rock of melancholy, to ease his mind, and out of a fellow feeling for others, he composed his immortal work, "The Anatomy of Melancholy." He calls it a cento, a patchwork, laboriously collected out of divers writers, but sine injuria. He says with Macrobius, 'Omne meum nihil meum': 'It is all mine and none mine.'

"The Anatomy of Melancholy" has not always been understood, it is much more than

A mire, ankle-deep of deliberate confusion
Made up of old jumbles of classic allusion.

It is a great medical treatise (the greatest ever written by a layman), orderly in arrangement, intensely serious in purpose, and weighty beyond belief with authorities. The sources are to be found in sacred and profane literature, to the time of Burton. There is probably no English author who quotes from so many writers on so many subjects.

As he says, he had access to good libraries in the Bodleian and Christ Church. His own Library as disposed in his will, went in part to friends, in part to the Bodleian, and in part to Christ Church. His books are readily identified, as the name "Robertus Burton" or "R.B." is written on the title-page of each, usually across the middle. Photographs were shown of some of the title-pages, and particular attention was called to Burton's curious cipher, usually at the bottom of the page, which looks as though it were made up of three r's. The Bodleian books have been picked out and number 580. The Christ Church books, 429, have been collected together and now surround a portrait of Burton, copied from the original in Brasenose College.

Only a few of the books are annotated. There is a memorial verse for the tomb of King James, numerous astrological memoranda, a horoscope of Queen Elizabeth, and Burton's own horoscope, practically the same as that on his tomb in Christ Church. The most important part of the collection at the Bodleian is composed of seventeenth-century plays and pamphlets, the 'baggage books' which Bodley thought might bring scandal were the library stuffed with them.

Though by profession a divine, by inclination Burton was a physician, and there is no English medical author of the seventeenth century whose writings have anything like the same encyclopaedic character. The first two partitions form a great treatise on mental aberrations, preceded by a

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remarkable introduction, and diversified with digressions as he calls them, one of which on 'Air Rectified' is a treatise on climate in relation to health. There are about 86 medical works among the Burton books, none of which are of very great importance. Part III of the Anatomy examines all the kinds of love, its nature, difference, objects, etc., and forms the most elaborate treatise ever written on the subject. Reference to all the love-stories of sacred and profane literature are to be found in these pages. Among the Bodley books are scores of contemporary plays and an interesting 1602 edition of the Venus and Adonis. Burton's favourite poets were Chaucer, Spenser, Daniel, Buchanan, Sydney, Ben Jonson, Toftes, and Challoner.

In many places Burton apologizes that he should have been carried away by a by-stream, 'which as a rillet is deduced from the main channel of my studies.' He had ever been desirous to suppress his studies in Divinity. More than one half of the books are theological. From some of these he gets a few details for his remarkable section on Religious Melancholy, in many respects the most original in the work.

A complete set of the seventeenth-century edition, eight in number, was exhibited. In acknowledging a cordial vote of thanks offered him by the President, Professor Osler mentioned that save for Sterne's borrowings for "Tristram Shandy" and a reference by Dr. Johnson, there is no evidence of any interest having been taken in Burton during the eighteenth century, and no edition of the Anatomy was produced. The revival of the book was probably due to Ferrier's criticism of Sterne's liftings.