

III.

NOTICE RESPECTING AN ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT ON VELLUM,
WHICH FORMERLY BELONGED TO MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS. Com-
MUNICATED BY PROFESSOR C. PIAZZI SMYTH, THROUGH R. M. SMITH,
Esq., F.S.A. Scot. (ILLUSTRATED BY A PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINT.)

Along with some stereographs which I received from my friend Pro-
fessor Smyth on his return from Russia, there was one of a missal, which
had been the property of Mary Queen of Scots. The subject being one
likely to interest this Society, I asked permission to exhibit it here in



Draped from Miss Scarr's Day Plates

by W & A K Johnson, Edinburgh

PHOTOGRAPH OF QUEEN MARY'S MISSAL NOW AT ST PETERSBURG

One third the size of the Original

Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

the stereoscope, with which my kind friend had also provided me; and at same time requested that he would give me, in writing, his verbal communication regarding it. The request was not only granted, but with a generous appreciation of the object, I have the honour of presenting, in his name, a copy to the Society; (see page 390).

The following is the communication:—

“ Among other objects of interest in Russia of which I succeeded in bringing away photographic records during the recent trip, to whose realization the kind services of yourself and Mr Millar, M.P. of Leith so much contributed, was, as you know, Queen Mary's Fotheringhay missal; a subject which has perhaps sufficient of national interest about it to justify my requesting you to present a nature-painted picture on glass, in a suitable stereoscope, to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

“ Although my visit to the great empire of the North and East was mainly connected with science, still, when I heard in St Petersburg of there being, in the Imperial Library of that city, a very precious manuscript volume that had belonged to Queen Mary, and had been written in—some also added illuminated—by her royal hand during her English captivity, I could not but be anxious to bring back to the capital of Scotland some veri-facsimile of the handiwork of one as talented as unfortunate, and as much misunderstood by some as admired by others.

“ Towards this end I had already a small photographic apparatus with me; but that, by itself, would have availed little while in a strange land, had not my wife made the acquaintance of a Russian lady of exalted sentiment and of infinite spirit. No sooner had this lady heard of my wish, than she took up the idea most warmly and enthusiastically: ‘*Marie Stuart!*’ she exclaimed, as if it were a name she had long been accustomed to admire, and immediately she turned round to the company, telling them, in Russian, of the project on foot, inquiring how it might best be carried out, and assured us that she would forthwith commence her plans for procuring me leave to take the much-desired photograph, and that we might depend upon her.

“ Again we saw the lady after some weeks; she had in the meanwhile ascertained that the book had been removed from the Imperial

Library in the Nevski Prospekt, and was now deposited in the museum of the Palace of the Hermitage on the Neva. The keeper of that museum had been accordingly applied to, but had intimated insuperable difficulties; no such thing as a photograph could be taken, he said, without the Emperor's express permission being asked. 'Then the Emperor's permission shall be asked,' replied the undaunted lady. Again, accordingly, she set her influence to work; and in about ten days after, her son-in-law kindly called on us to say that the requisite leave had been obtained, and that he was ready then and there to conduct us to the Hermitage to see the book, and arrange ulterior proceedings.

"On receiving this joyful news we lost not a moment's time, and jumping into a droshky at the door, bade the Ishvostschik or driver, with a bishop's hat, a sage's beard, and long priestly garment of dark blue cloth, drive us straight to the Hermitage, and keep up all the way with our leading friend in his private vehicle dashing along with its magnificent high-trotting coal-black horse.

"In a few minutes we were at the entrance of the Hermitage; and passing under the portico adorned with colossal caryatides in native granite, we entered the glass folding-doors, were relieved from our outer apparel by the semi-military attendants, had crossed the polished marble hall, and were just about to ascend the grand staircase with noiseless tread, when our friend looked down at my feet, and started as if shot to the heart,—'Goodness defend us! what is the matter?' 'Your goloshes!' he ejaculated in a piteous groan; and sure enough I had omitted to take off my India-rubbers at the door; and it was inexcusable too, after being so many weeks in the country, to have forgotten a rule which is of such undeviating rigour, alike in the government office and the private house of every degree; and has moreover a very reasonable foundation in the extraordinary inclemency almost perpetual to the climate outside, and the warm Italian atmosphere which ever reigns within each Russian stove-warmed room; where orange trees and myrtle, euphorbiæ and *Ficus elasticus* are seen flourishing side by side with the northern tables and chairs, looking-glasses and inkstands, just like necessary pieces of household furniture.

"Well, we were very soon again *en route*, and this time perfectly *en regle*, and, after much wandering about the immense palace, were brought

into the missal-room by one of the officers of that department, to wait there until duly visited by the great man of the museum. He soon came, in a blue court dress with a large diamond star on his coat and several crosses round his neck, gave us the required leave, and then we began our examination.

“The book so much sought for was at once extracted for us out of a glass case, and proved to be a moderate-sized quarto of between two and three hundred pages, vellum, and bound in dark crimson velvet with gilt clasps, handsomely, but too well; for this binding was modern, and the wretch, whoever he was who performed it, had actually cut the leaves even along their outer edges, removing, with the margin, much documentary matter.

“We examined every page of the book, and found the general description given of it by Prince Labanoff in the seventh volume of his “*Lettres de Marie Stuart*” extremely exact. No part of the writing proper, or of the illumination, is by the unfortunate queen; it is probably earlier than her mature day, and must have been the work of distinguished professional hands, for it has been described by able authorities as a superb manuscript in Gothic character, magnificently enriched with arabesque miniatures in gold and brilliant colours of the first order, and was only called hers as having been her property. Her property, truly, it had been, and her companion too, during almost all that was eminently happy or unhappy in her life. It came apparently into her possession in France about four years before her marriage with the dauphin; in token whereof, the 25th page bears the legend, in the queen’s own hand: “Ce livre est à moi, Marie, Royne, 1554.” And as we find it, under the name of “*Livre d’Heures*,” mentioned in the Chartley catalogue of her belongings in August 1586, and again under the name of a mattins book in the *inventorye of the Jewells, &c. of the late Queene of Scottes* in February 1587, as bound in velvet, with corner pieces, middle plates and clasps of gold adorned with diamonds, we may, without risking much, conclude it to have been a present from her royal lover and future husband.

“Certainly she appears to have cherished the volume dearly, to have carried it with her from the happy court of France, to have kept it by her through her varied career in her native land, and, finally, during her

long imprisonment in England. Here it was that she began to enter in it her mournful thoughts and melancholy anticipations, always in French, and generally in verse, of a quaint and somewhat transcendental style. Every spare portion of a page is thus occupied; and one of the pages, in the photographic view, the only originally blank page in the book, is covered with such verses, and with memorandums of various dates, filled in at last sideways and cornerways, as if the length of her imprisonment had far surpassed those expectations which the queen had too confidently indulged, when her more regular and full-sized entries were made.

“At first sight of this scrawled and painfully indited page, one is inclined to think that the poor queen must, like many other prisoners, have been kept ill-supplied with paper of every description; but that is at once negatived by the Inventorye before quoted, which mentions, “that there remayneth in the sayd late Queenes cabinet and other places a greate number of *bookes*, drinking glasses, and other small thinges not mentioned in this Inventorye, which are also claymed by the severall ser-vantes as geven to them by their mistris.” Something special, therefore, tended to induce the Queen, towards the downfall of her career, to make this particular book the recipient of her feelings and fears; and what cause so likely as that it was a gift from her first love, when he vowed to cherish and defend her through life, so help him God! This view is perhaps strengthened by an explanation I would attempt to give of a circumstance yet unaccounted for—viz., that throughout the book there are introduced into the arabesques numerous shields for coats of arms, once evidently duly emblazoned; but such emblazoning has been subsequently erased, without a single exception, from the beginning to the end, and one example of such a blank and rudely rubbed shield is contained in the right-hand page of the photograph. What were these erased arms?

“If the book was a royal prenuptial present, it was probably prepared for the occasion; and Mary’s own insignia, or such as would have pleased her, would have been inserted. Now she laid claim, from an early period, to the throne of England; and when Dauphiness, on the death of the English Queen Mary, had, with the Dauphin, and the approval of the French people, “the English arms engraved on their plate, embroidered on their banners, and painted on their furniture.” Hence we may con-

clude that there was something depicted on those shields which, even at first rather too ambitious, would be thought in a captive Queen to be actually treasonable.

“ At all events, the book was kept in England, and about the Court, until 1615, as is gathered from certain entries (that of Francis Bacon, of the immortal “*Novum Organon Scientiarum*,” amongst others), and was then lost sight of until the early years of the French Revolution, when, stripped of its costly binding, the volume was bought at a cheap rate in Paris, amidst a heap of plunder from the royal library there, by M. Doubrovsky, a gentleman attached to the Russian embassy in France, and by him transmitted to St Petersburg. The honourable and careful manner in which this very remarkable prize is now preserved in the Northern capital reflects the highest credit on the Russian government; yet, as it indicates also that they are not likely to part with the original, we may as well turn to the photograph and see what it conveys.

“ On the right page is a specimen of the illumination, which, with Latin and French prayers, forms the body of the book; on the left, the Queen’s manuscript. Attending to this more particularly, and examining the glass-plate with a microscope, there may be read, in excellent confirmation of Prince Labanoff’s accurate interpretation, near the top of the page—

“ qui iamais davantage eust contraire le sort
Si la vie mest moins ntile que la mort.
Et plustost que chager de mes maus ladventure
Chacun change pour moi dhumeur et de nature

MARIE R

Underneath this—

“ xviii d’Octobre advertir fl.”

On the outer side, in three descending lines—

“ escrire au segretaire pour Douglas’”

Then the verse—

“ Comē autres fois la renomēe
ne vole plus par lunivers
isy borne son cours divers
la chose delle plus aimee

MARIE R.”

In three ascending lines on the outer edge—

“*mais nous savons un bel ange
or suiet de notre louange*”

Then the verse—

“*les heures ie guide et le iour
par lordre exact de ma carrière
quittant mon triste seiour
pour isy croistre ma lumiere*”

Next follows—

“*celle qui d'honneur sait combler
chacun du bruit de sa louange
ne peut moins qu'a soi ressembler
en effet nestant queun bel ange*”

Across these verses, in a descending line, is written—

“*Ce xxx Mai.*”

And in a similar direction, on the outer edge is the stanza, curtailed by the binder having cut off the bottom of the page—

“*Ma voix et mes accor
Sì ne vous touch
Comēnt pourr
Et dire que le*”

There are also two horizontal lines—

“*il fault plus que la renommee
pour dire et publier après*”

and traces that there had been a third line below them, probably a fourth too, before the knife did its work.

“Although, as above stated, Prince Labanoff's version of the Queen's writing may justly be termed successful, and even accurate for all the more important features, yet you will find some minor differences. For example, there is very little of his punctuation in the original, few of his capitals; and, while he rather leads to the conclusion that it was regularly and methodically “*imprimè en caractères gothiques,*” you have only to look at the photograph to see that the royal verses are in a sort of writing between italics and ordinary manuscript, of a free and sometimes very flowing character.

“This is an amount of difference in a simple matter of description, which it would have been impossible in so careful an observer as Prince

Labanoff to have made with the book before him ; and it caused me much doubt and perplexity, until I fell upon the note to page 346 of his seventh volume, wherein he mentions that he has prepared his description from accounts of the book sent to him in London from St Petersburg. Those accounts he terms *fac-similes*, and it was such that he demanded should be prepared and forwarded to him ; but as that order was given somewhere about the year 1843—or long before the day of collodion-photography—the so-called fac-similes must have been produced by hand, and so included an element of human weakness quite sufficient to account for their communicator's ultimate divergence from the original facts ; for man is certainly not equal to matter in preparing a *reproduction* of any given specimen, even of caligraphy, good or bad.

“The tracing of the cause of this discrepance, I trust you will allow, is not without its use ; for the sense to be attached to the Queen's verses would be materially altered had they been really printed and in regular lines, duly punctuated and initialed by capitals, as are the contents proper of the book—viz. its ancient psalms and prayers—instead of being in reality merely scribbled in, almost at random. Not only, indeed, is this the case, but there are even verbal symptoms perceptible of these manuscript scribblings having been crude first thoughts, materially corrected occasionally on subsequent reflection. Thus the last line quoted indicates, in the photograph, by a scratched-out “publier,” that it was intended to have stood originally,

“pour publier et dire apres ;”

but Queen Mary, as quickwitted as fair, soon saw that her second was but supererogation after her first, and therefore altered it to

“pour dire et publier apres.”

And again, in the fourth line of the first extract, the original leading word stood “chacune,” but has been altered to “chacun”—an alteration only of a letter, but indicating volumes ; for is it not a proof of poor Mary's true womanhood, and a touching confession that, if in the midst of her contrary fates and unhappy imprisonment, when death was already beginning to appear her only alternative, she felt inclined to accuse her female attendants of turning round upon her in misfortune, and changing their feelings and dispositions from what they once were ;

yet, on maturer consideration, she expunged this libel on her own sex, and acknowledged that, though her lords might have abandoned her now, her ladies were constant and faithful; loving long, and attached to her unalterably; true to woman's eternal nature, which, once expanding in perfect love, never knows, through good or evil fortune, another change?

"Such, then, is the main subject matter of the photograph which I now beg to send you for presentation to the Scottish Antiquaries."

P.S.—In the felicitous address of Lord Neaves at the opening of the session, the attention of the audience was directed to the value of obtaining photographs of such objects as could not themselves be carried away. An additional inducement to carry out his Lordship's suggestion is this,—that such photographs, taken almost instantaneously, and in ever so small and portable a size, do yet,—if on glass and well defined,—contain all the minute details which may afterwards be required, and which may be brought out at leisure sufficiently enlarged for all purposes.

This quality is even more apparent in a further description of the right-hand page of the Missal, which Professor Smyth has sent me as follows:—

"With reference to your wish to ascertain more of the minute particulars of the illuminated page of the missal, I have requested Mr Hart, who has recently fitted up for me an appropriate compound microscope, to convey it to the rooms of the Antiquaries Society, in order that you may, by its means, examine the glass photograph and prove the details to the meeting. With a magnifying power of from 12 to 15 linear, you will make out the smaller features, probably almost as well as with the real book before you.

"The Gothic characters on the page in question are the beginning of the 38th Psalm in Latin: 'Domine ne in furore tuo arguas me, neque in irâ tuâ corripias me.'

"The miniature represents King David with an open book and a harp before him; Jerusalem, somewhat Germanised in its architecture, but neighboured with palm trees, is in the distance; and beside him is a model of the Temple, which he, a man of war and blood, was not to be permitted to build; but in the heavens is an appearance of the Deity, reassuring the penitent spirit of the sweet singer of Israel.

“ The floral ornamentation around the pages is well worthy of close attention, not only for its extreme beauty, and the fertility of invention which it displays in every part, but for the number of Scottish plants which are introduced, the ivy, convolvulus, strawberry, apple-blossom, bulrush, &c., appearing abundantly, and, above all, the *thistle*; this the artist has never been tired of reproducing.

“ As examples of how satisfactorily a magnifying-and-copying camera brings out these minute points, notwithstanding the unavoidable very small size of the original photograph, I beg to send you and the Society, with this, some magnified copies on paper about 3 inches square, of four little portions, each rather less than a quarter inch square on the stereoscopic glass.

“ The first of these portions contains the memorable signature, ‘ Marie R.,’ with the ends of four lines of verse, containing, amongst others, the words ‘ renommée’ and ‘ aimée’ (renown and love), decided favourites, it would appear from this page, with the poor queen.

“ The second has the initial letter D of the Psalm just mentioned; it contains within itself the Christian symbol of the Trinity, and has very rich floral ornament below and to the left.

“ The third gives the tail-piece of the Psalm verse, with a lighter style of ornament.

“ And the fourth gives the mutilated armorial shield, where the vellum ground may be observed rubbed up into fluff, and the adjacent ornament much smeared by the violence of the detergent operations that must have been employed.”

A further postscript states that the accompanying Plate is a photographic copy of one member of the original stereograph, magnified four times, and is almost half the size of the book itself.

The cordial thanks of the Society were voted to Professor SMYTH; as also to Madame DE LERCHE of St Petersburg, through whose good offices the Professor got access to the Missal.