

Books of the time of Linacre.

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Moore (Sir M.)

BOOKS
OF THE
TIME OF LINACRE



MAY 8, 1913

— tanquam philosophorum habent disciplinæ ex ipsis
Vocabula.

The College library contains three books which belonged to our Founder and contain his handwriting. We also possess more than fifty books which appeared in his time and some of which he undoubtedly read. Among these are several called by bibliographers *incunabula*. This Ciceronian word means originally swaddling clothes, and is figuratively used for an origin or beginning. It has been adopted as an English word, and the earliest example which the Oxford dictionary gives of its use is a sentence of De Quincey printed in 1824: "Here they fancy that they can detect the incunabula of the revolutionary spirit." De Quincey was a great reader of Leibnitz, and I suspect that he borrowed the word from the Latin writings of that philosopher. The Oxford dictionary says that the first sense is—"The earliest stages in the development of anything." The second use is—"Books produced in the infancy of the art of printing, *spec.* those printed before 1500."

This is the sense in which the word is most often heard at the present day.

These incunabula are most of them beautiful works of art, fine printing on admirable paper. All deserve careful examination. One of the oldest volumes contains Varro, Columella, and Palladius, three classical writers on country pursuits, and was printed at Venice in 1472. Another collection on the same subjects printed at Reggio ten years later contains Cato, Varro, and Columella. At its end are some verses telling of the subjects and the printer :

" Priscorum quicumque studet monumenta doceri
Terrarum et cultus arma deosque simul
Hos legat antiquos ; Varronem tumque Catonis
Scripta : Columellam : Palladiumque legat

Rura canunt : rurisque deos : his vita magistris
Desuevit querna pellere glande famem,
Impressit regii : nuper volumina quorum
Optime bottonus nomine Bartholomeus."

Then we have a beautiful Virgil with illuminated initials printed at Venice in October, 1486, and the very first edition of Homer in two volumes printed at Florence in 1488, and a splendid Latin Avicenna of 1498 in three volumes printed at Lyons, and a Rhazes printed at Brescia in 1486. These and some others are upon the library tables this evening.

Avicenna and Rhazes were the medical text-books of Linacre's youth. He had read Homer and Virgil as we have, but we have one huge book which none of us have read—'The Catholicon' of Balbus de Janua, printed at Nuremberg in 1486 by A. Koberger, with which our founder was probably familiar, for though he was a great physician and a fine Greek scholar, he was also devoted to Latin grammar. 'The Catholicon' is a Latin dictionary and grammar written by a Dominican friar, and its imperfections may have been one of the causes which urged Linacre to write his 'De Emendata Structurâ Latini Sermonis,' which appeared in the year of his death, 1524. De Janua's book was printed by Gutenberg in 1460, an earlier edition than that we possess, but it had been an inmate of libraries for a long time in manuscript, for the catalogue of the library of Dover Priory, printed by Dr. M. R. James and written in 1389, mentions a copy. I can imagine our founder looking into 'The Catholicon' and noting its errors and determining to make his own treatise perfect.

NORMAN MOORE.

