

Contributed Articles.

NICHOLAS DE LYRA.

A short time ago, by a sort of accident, I came into possession of an old copy of the Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul, by Nicholas de Lyra. I was primarily interested in the book as a specimen of very early printing, for it bears the date 1478, less than twenty-five years after the invention of the art, or at least after the publication of Gutenberg's first Bible. It was issued at Mantua, Virgil's birthplace, in Northern Italy, by Paul John de Putzbach, a native of Mainz. The printer may have been an apprentice of the great Gutenberg himself. The book is a moderate sized folio, printed on heavy hand-made paper, in a crabbed black-letter type, two columns to a page, with wide margins on which are found a few manuscript notes. The initial letters have all been painted in by hand in blue and red alternately, and some of them are considerably elaborated. The volume is in a capital state of preservation, handsomely bound in half-vellum, ornamented on the back with neat gilt tooling, and altogether is a good sample of fifteenth century book-making, such as might well grace the shelves of any bibliophile. There are a few, but not many older

printed books to be found in any of our Canadian libraries.

As I turned over the pages of the old tome, however, and dipped into it here and there, deciphering the simple mediæval Latin, which would be easy enough reading but for the numerous contractions used to save space, I was led to inquire a little more as to the history and personality of Lyra. Hitherto, like most students who have not made a specialty of church history, I had been content with the summing up of his character and work contained in the well-known couplet:

Si Lyra non lyrasset,
Lutherus non saltasset.

"If Lyra had not played, Luther had not danced," apparently making him one of the forerunners of the Evangelical Reformation theology. But I felt that it was worth while to know something more about him in order to see how far this was true and in what sense. I soon found that it was more of a taunt than a truth, with just enough *Lasis* in fact to lend it force.

The standard authorities do not give us very full details as to Lyra's life, though they tell us enough to show that