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Literary Forgeries

HOW GREAT SCHOLARS WERE FOOLED.

(By KENNETH LYON).

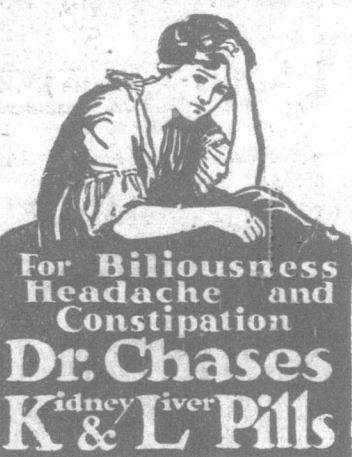
Hardouin, the Jesuit, once observed that in his opinion the ancient classics were the work of medieval monks. Colour is lent to this paradox by the astonishing activities of literary forgers. There are in existence letters from Euripides, Themistocles, and Socrates and the tyrant Phalaris, believed for centuries to be authentic till the English scholar, Bentley, in the sixteenth century, proved them to be forgeries. It is disappointing to learn that Aesop's Fables were not Aesop's at all, but were given their present form by a fourteenth-century monk, Maximus Planudes, who based his version on the verses of Babrius, an imperial usher of the third century.

Simonides' Swindles. But some of the most amazing classical forgeries are the work of modern experts. In 1855 a Greek called Constantine Simonides brought to light an apparently ancient manuscript of

a lost author Uranus. So miraculous was Simonides' skill in imitating ancient Greek writing that it deceived the great German scholar, Dindorf, who had the text published at Oxford with a Latin preface by himself. In 1860 Simonides announced the discovery of a manuscript of St. Matthew's Gospel "written by Nicolaus the Deacon in the fifteenth year after the Ascension." Fragments of other Gospels followed, together with parts of Zoroaster and the log-book of Alexander the Great's admiral. The learned world was thrilled and in 1863 it took no less a body than the Royal Society of Literature to condemn the discoveries finally as forgeries.

Another Bombshell.

Simonides threw another bombshell on the literary world by claiming to have written for the Czar of Russia the great fourth century manuscript of the New Testament discovered by Tischendorf on Mount Sinai in 1844 and known as "Codex Sinaiticus." This controversy can be read in the columns of the Guardian and Literary Churchman of 1862 and 1863. Whatever be the ethics of literary forgery, its



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history includes, besides the tragedy of Chatterton, three first-class comedies; and of all the forgers who have hoaxed the highbrows I should like to have seen Palmanazar the Formosan most.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century Palmanazar was brought to England from the Continent by an army chaplain. He at once interested the religious world by claiming to have converted the Formosans to Christianity from a most horrid barbarism whose rites included the burning of the hearts of 18,000 boys under the age of nine, at an annual sacrifice.

The Formosans lived longer than ordinary human beings; Palmanazar's own grandfather enjoyed the activities of youth at the age of 117, a blessing which he attributed to the habit of sucking the blood of a young viper warm every morning.

This soi-disant missionary secured an introduction to the Bishop of London, who sent him to Christ Church, Oxford. His history of Formosa proved a best seller of 1704 to 1705. He held a public discussion on the subject before the Royal Institution, and later dined with Sir Hans Sloane, the Prussian Ambassador, and a couple of dukes, in whose presence he was constrained, owing to a habit caught in Formosa, to eat his meat raw. Palmanazar ultimately repented and became notorious for his piety, hard work, and friendship with Dr. Johnson.

Spurious Shakespeares.

The forgeries of "a second Chatterton" ended in laughter instead of tears. W. H. Ireland, the son of a keen Shakespearean, provided his father with a mass of Shakespearean papers, including his Protestant Confession of Faith, letters from Queen Elizabeth and Anne Hathaway, and two hitherto undiscovered plays, "Vortigern and Rowena" and "Henry

II." These Shakespeareans caused acute controversy, but Ireland obtained a testimonial as to their genuineness from the Post Laureate, two scholars, three peers, and no less a person than Boswell.

Ireland's cup must have been full when Sheridan himself produced the new Shakespearean play, "Vortigern and Rowena," at Drury Lane on April 2nd, 1796, with Kemble as Vortigern. The audience listened dumbfounded till Kemble came to the line: "I would this solemn mockery were o'er," when the house rocked with laughter and Vortigern never obtained another hearing. Ireland subsequently confessed his forgeries.

\$6,000 for Forged Letters.

But perhaps literary effrontery has never succeeded so well as that of Vrain-Denis Lucas. He began in 1854 by inventing ancestors for the new rich, and had the luck to meet a Dr. Chasles, an astronomer of world-wide reputation and incredible credulity. To this sagacious mathematician Lucas sold 27,000 forged letters for \$6,000. These letters included some from Pascal to Robert Boyle claiming to have discovered the law of gravitation twenty-five years before Newton. The Chauvinists of the French Academy were delighted. Lucas produced letters from Rabelais, Lucas Plato, Mary Magdalene, Sir Isaac Newton,

The British Empire Exhibition

STRANGE EFFIGIES IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

(WM. E. HURT, London.)

The British Museum, in London, has been the growth of nearly two centuries, the first purchase for the collection having been made in 1753, although the present magnificent building in Bloomsbury was not completed until 1853, the gap of a century. The National History Museum at South Kensington with its splendid array of specimens was not commenced until 1856. These museums and the adjacent museums and colleges of science, the Imperial Institute, the Royal Albert Hall, and the Albert Memorial are all clustered together and each is well worthy of a visit.

The Lowther Arcade, in the Strand, that Toy Bazaar beloved by children of past generations, has disappeared with most of the old institutions. The Royal Polytechnic, in Regent Street, opened in 1839 and closed in 1881, is still remembered. Who can ever forget the thrill that went over the youthful beholder when the diving-bell with its human freight sank beneath the water, and the suspense with which one waited for it to emerge? Many were the exhibitions devoted to Napoleon and Wellington that flourished in London in the early part of the last century, but these have long passed away leaving not a rack behind. Among the many entertainments that have come and again one

Cleopatra, and Galileo, and Dr. Chasles exhibited 381 of these letters to the French Academy, which spent two years in acrimonious discussion as to their genuineness, recorded in 400 painful pages of their "Proceedings." But forgery has made serious as well as comic history. Who can gauge the effect of the "False Decretals" and the "Donation of Constantine?"

In the fourth century, so wrote the ecclesiastical forger of the ninth century, Constantine, on being cured of leprosy by the vision of St. Peter and St. Paul, out of gratitude bequeathed the temporal power of the Empire to the Pope and his successors. Successive Popes and prelates appealed to these forgeries to strengthen their claims against the civil power; and it was not till the fifteenth century that Laurentius Valla revealed the truth about these monstrous forgeries, which lend a sinister colour to the saying of Manning that "Dogma must overcome history."—John of London's Weekly.

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Reference has been made to Mme. Tussaud's Exhibition, that "Val-halla" of Immortals which came to England from France in 1802 and continues to be one of the foremost of the houses of entertainment in the Metropolis. The public never seems to tire of inspecting the figures of past and present celebrities, their precious relics, and its tableaux. There is, however, to be seen in London a collection of waxen figures in a place where one would least expect to find them—namely Westminster Abbey. Here, in a gallery not ordinarily accessible to the public, there is a minor "Tussaud's" exhibition of perhaps equal interest to the monuments in the sacred edifice. The collection has received the names of "The Ragged Regiment" and "The Play of the Dead Volks." For many centuries the curious custom prevailed at state funerals, even in old England, of exhibiting in the funeral car, or carrying in procession, a waxen effigy of the individual whose remains were about to be consigned to the tomb. The head of the defunct monarch, statesman, or warrior was modelled in wax, and an effigy was built up and clad in the actual garments worn by the deceased in his lifetime but embellished with false gems. Often, when the coffin had been deposited in the vault, the figure was placed over the tomb as a sort of temporary substitute for a stone monument. Several of these effigies are still preserved in glass cases in the gallery in question. One is a striking model of Queen Elizabeth arrayed in the familiar ruff costume of the period, and other effigies are those of King Charles II, William and Mary, Queen Anne, the elder Pitt, and Nelson who appears to have been the last personage thus represented.

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