

### News from the Library c. 1700.

In the wide field of the College's manuscripts, the commentaries on the Pentateuch by Hrabanus Maurus (d. 856), abbot of Fulda and archbishop of Mainz, can be considered one of the more recondite treasures because of the comparative rarity of manuscript witnesses. The abbot wrote such capacious commentaries that propagating copies imposed a serious labour on the scribe. His work, embedded in six volumes of the *Patrologia Latina*, has canonical status, but manuscript copies are comparatively few. Not surprisingly, the abbreviations compiled by his pupil, Walahfrid Strabo, achieved a wider circulation. New College's MS 29, a copy made early in the thirteenth century, contains Hrabanus's Commentary on Genesis and Walahfrid's *Abbreviationes* of Hrabanus's commentaries on Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. What lends the book added interest is that it carries evidence for the way it was used and read in the eighteenth century, a time when intellectual life at the college, and university life in general, is usually thought of as being in low waters. Between the pages of the manuscript is found a letter, dated 5 June 1700, from a Danish scholar, George Claussen of Copenhagen, to his friend, the College fellow David Trimnell. Claussen offers an entertaining budget of news, discussing the university in Copenhagen and the likelihood of war with the Duke of Schleswig-Holstein. He asks Trimnell for news and of 'what good books be in ye press', and makes a request for information on the texts contained in this manuscript: 'Pray, good Sir, acquaint me how yr MSS [[. . .]] ye Colledge library of Rabanus Maurus's Commentaries upon Exodus and Leviticus does begin and finish; and how he does prosecute ye words Exod. 12 'Tollat unusquisque agnum etc. Erit autem agnus sine macula' (Exod. 12:3-5, instructions for selecting the Passover lamb).

Our manuscript seems to have been copied from one now at Trinity College in Cambridge, MS B. 2. 4, a copy of the later twelfth century originally from the cathedral priory at Canterbury. Both copies show the same texts in the same order, the style of the opening initial has been copied faithfully, and marginal notes in the Trinity manuscript identifying the authors of embedded *auctoritates* not otherwise identified were taken over into the text of our book and added in red ink. It is not known when the book arrived in Oxford, but it was pawned in university chests on at least six separate occasions in the fifteenth century, according to erased inscriptions on a back leaf. It was finally plucked off the second-hand market by Thomas Lustycyll, fellow of New College from 1425 to 1440 (he had died by July 1444), who gave the book to his friend John Gynnor. Gynnor declared on 28 August 1463 that it should pass to the College after his own death and be chained in the library. It was received by the College in 1492, and, we now know, opened and referred to in 1700 in answer to a query from Copenhagen.

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