

AN OLD BANK.

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Last evening Mr. F. G. Hilton Price, F. G. S., read at a meeting of the London and Middlesex Archæological Society a paper on the history of Temple Bar and of the banking-house of Messrs. Child. As an instance of the proverb that "it is an ill wind that blows no one some good," Mr. Price stated that the threatened downfall of Temple Bar last Summer led to searches being made among the archives of Messrs. Child, who for years have been tenants of the double chamber over the Bar, where they have stowed away their ledgers and journals for two centuries. On their removal into the house, these archives were carefully searched, and materials were found towards a tolerably complete history of Messrs. Child, whose house is "universally acknowledged to be the first banking-house in succession to the goldsmith's trade out of which it sprung." It is generally said, but the fact rests only on tradition, that Oliver Cromwell kept here his cash accounts; but it is certain that Nell Gwynne did so, and the ledgers of the firm show the account of her executors, and also those of King William III. and of Queen Mary, his consort. The original sign of the house was "The Marygold," which may still be seen in the water-mark of all the checks drawn on Child & Co. The original sign, too, though no longer set up outside in the street, is preserved in the "shop," as it is still called. It is of oak, the ground stained green, with a gilt border, a marigold, and a sun; and below is the motto, "*Ainsi mon âme.*" Many of the customers of the bank, toward the end of the seventeenth century, used to address their letters to "Mr. Alderman Child and Partner, Goldsmiths, at the Marygold, next door to Temple Barr"; and checks with the same address are extant, dated as early as 1694. Again, in 1732, when the second Sir Francis Child was Lord Mayor, the Earl of Oxford addressed his checks and orders on the firm to "The Worshipful, the Lord Mayor and Company at Temple Bar." The sign of the Marygold, added Mr. Price, appears to have arisen out of a tavern or public ordinary, which is known to have existed on the site as early as the reign of James I., and in 1619 its keeper, one Crompton, was "presented" by his neighbors on account of the disorderly character of his tavern. It was in 1681 that Francis Child took a lease of the premises from St. Dunstan's Parish, agreeing to lay out £800 in building; and it appears that in course of time both the "Sugar Loaf and Green Lettice," and also the "Devil Tavern," with which Ben Jonson's name is associated, were absorbed into the banking-house, and the adjoining houses in Child's place. The kitchen in the rear of the present bank, and the commodious cellars below it, in Mr. Price's opinion, belonged not to the "Devil" but to the "Sugar Loaf and Lettice." The Devil's Tavern was pulled down in 1787, and no doubt originally it had for its sign "St. Dunstan pulling the Devil by the Nose." The original rules of the "Apollo" Club which met here are still in the possession of Messrs. Child. Mr. Price next proceeded to illustrate the family connections of the bank, including the Blanchards, Wheelers, Childs, Rogers, Jacksons, Tyringhams, Backwells, &c.; but these details would scarcely interest the public. He noted as worthy of remark, and as showing how the banker grew out of the goldsmith, the fact that the front office at Messrs. Child's is still called the "shop," and the back office, where the ledgers are now kept, the "counting-house." He next noticed Nell Gwynne's account, and the fact of her dying in 1687 with her banking account overdrawn—a debt which her executors agreed to pay off with the very moderate interest of five per cent. One of her executors was Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester. Then he connected the bank with Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, by the following anecdote: "It is recorded that in the year 1689 the stability of Child's Bank became precarious in consequence of a rumor being prevalent that a 'run' was about to be made upon it. This coming to the knowledge of the Duchess, then Lady Churchill, she set to work and collected among her friends as much gold as she was able, which she brought down to the bank in her coach on the very morning of the intended run, and so enabled the firm to meet all demands upon them." He also traced the use of pass-books as far back as the reign of Queen Anne, previous to which a "customer was wont to call occasionally at the bank and check his account in the ledger in the presence of one of the partners. The customer having agreed that his account was correct, would sign his name on the folio of the ledger, adding, 'I allow this account,' and very frequently the partners signed it as well." The first pass-book appears to have been issued to Lady Carteret, in compliance with a request conveyed in a letter, so that possibly we may owe to a lady this improvement on such primitive banking as that above described. In those early days of banking, added Mr. Price, London bankers issued their own notes; there have hitherto been stored away above Temple Bar whole files of such bank-notes of Messrs. Child, all of which bear the Bar itself, and not the Marygold, as a vignette. Mr. F. Child, it appears, in 1729 devised a new form of promissory notes, with a picture of Temple Bar in the left-hand corner; but they were discontinued before the end of the last century. Among the best known and most illustrious personages who have kept their banking account at Child's during the past two centuries are the names, besides those already mentioned, of Sir Robert Vyner, Samuel Pepys, Thomas Wood, of Littleton, the Earl of Castlemaine, Lady Anne Palmer, Lord Leigh, Lord Grandison, Sir John Mordaunt, Rowland Winn, Sir Alan Brodrick, Sir Walter Vane, the Earl of Carlisle, the Dukes of Devonshire, Bedford, and Bridgewater, Sir Thomas Osborne, afterward Duke of Leeds, Sir Charles Duncombe, Sir Thomas Skipwith, the Duke of Bolton, the Palmers of Dorney, Bishop Stillingfleet, Horace Walpole, the poet Dryden, John Duke of Marlborough, Lord Keeper North, Prince George of Denmark, and the Earls of Dorset and Middlesex. It is generally thought that Charles II., his Queen, and the Queen Mother (Henrietta Maria,) the Duke of York, Prince Rupert, &c., kept their cash accounts with Messrs. Child; but this, as Mr. Price showed, was a mistake, for they really banked with a Mr. Alderman Backwell, whose bank and its books and many of their customers passed to Messrs. Child. It may be added that Messrs. Backwell's ledgers and other books are still to be seen at Temple Bar. The walls of the room in which the meeting was held were decorated with some water-color sketches and rare prints of Temple Bar, the "Devil" Tavern, St. Clement's Daves Church, &c., lent by Mr. J. E. Gardner; and Mr. Waller, of Fleet street, exhibited a curious document on vellum, being an inventory of New Year's gifts to and from Queen Elizabeth and her courtiers at Hampton Court, in the first year of her reign, authenticated by her own royal sign manual.