Bodleian." Now every one of these statements is wrong: Gaston was born in 1331, he did not marry the daughter of the King of France, but the daughter of the King of Navarre. He wrote only one book on hunting, and it has been printed several times; and, finally, there are known to exist certainly forty MS. copies of it, the British Museum possessing, however, only one, and the Bodleian none at all, as the reader can ascertain by a glance at the Bibliography at the end of this volume, where the whereabouts of the forty copies are given.[1] It will be seen, therefore, that these criticisms of the masterful old veneur can hardly claim to be the outcome of the study of existing works or of original research, and they evince nescience not only concerning the spirit of the time when he lived, but also of historical facts easily ascertainable.

No man who loved hunting so ardently as Gaston incontestably did could possibly have been of voluptuous tastes. His book, which is a pattern of modesty, is the best possible proof of a strong, manly nature, of physical strength, of courage, and of his abhorrence of taking underhand advantages of his prey or of curtailing the hunted animal's chances of escape. Indeed, devotion to the chase such as his brought with it greater risks than those encountered by steel-clad knights on the battlefield. When kings were so "quick and deliver of limb" that they could run down the fleetest deer without horse, dog, or bow, as did, according to Chaucer, the English prince to whom our "Master of Game" was dedicated; when emperors followed huge man-eating bears, the terror of the surrounding country, into their dens, slaying them single-handed with spear or hunting-knife, as did Maximilian of Germany; when men thought nothing of following first on horseback, then on foot, a stag for two days following, sleeping out wherever night overtook them, as more than one French King did, to speak of that robust age and of those burly veneurs with a superior sneer makes one impatient of criticism of this sort by an age that has ceased to regard most of its sport as a test of endurance or of woodmanscraft.

[1] Curiously enough the quoted passage in italics bears a strong resemblance to one I wrote some time previously in "Country Life" (Dec. 7, 1901) when speaking of another work, *i.e.*, the "Master of Game." My words were: "Nineteen MS. copies (of the work) are known to exist, of which thirteen are in the British Museum, and three in the Bodleian." Though he does not acknowledge the source from which he obtained his information, which he has mistakenly attributed to the wrong author and wrong book, the similarity of the two sentences is remarkable, if I be mistaken in my assumption as to the paternity of the passage in question.

THE MS. 616 OF "GASTON PHOEBUS"

A DETAILED description of the various existing copies of "Gaston Phœbus"—forty or forty-one in number—will be found in the Bibliography at the end of this volume, but it may interest the reader to hear the story of the particular manuscript, preserved in the National Library of France at Paris, which contains the beautiful illuminations reproduced in our pages. It is without question the most sumptuous hunting book that exists, and few volumes have had such a strikingly romantic career.

Who the first owner of this Codex was is unfortunately unknown; we only know that it was not the copy which the author in his dedication says that he presented to his life-long friend and ally Philip the Bold, the erstwhile English prisoner. This lost MS. was probably written under Gaston's own eye by one or the other of his four secretaries, which Froissart tells us were constantly employed by Gaston de Foix. These he did not call John, or Gautier, or William, but nicknamed them "Bad me Serve," or "Good for Nothing." This priceless bibliophile treasure must have been adorned with magnificent illuminations, for already in the sixteenth century they were the subject of an enthusiastic account. This was by Argote de Molina in his *Libro de la Monteria*, published in Seville in 1582. Molina says: "It is embellished with illuminations executed with the very greatest skill, and is now in the San Lorenço Library in the Escurial, having been inherited by his Catholic Majesty the King our Master (Philip II.)" Once enshrined in what was one of, if not the greatest library of the time, it was not heard of again till Lavallée, in the middle of the last century, began his investigations concerning this Codex. At that time it was believed that it had perished in the great fire which consumed a portion of the Escurial Library in June 1671, but this turned out to be incorrect, for it was found that it had escaped that fate, and that it had disappeared only in the turbulent year of 1809 from the Escurial. What became of it no man knows.

But to return after this slight digression to our MS. 616. As one removes from its stout protective case the ponderous vellum-leaved Codex, now unfortunately, in consequence of the last fiery ordeal through which it passed at the sack of Neuilly, enveloped in a gaudy modern binding, one comes first upon a finely emblazoned coat of arms that takes up the whole page of smooth vellum. It contains a great number of quarterings, and round the shield is painted the many-linked chain of the Order of the Golden Fleece. According to Joseph Lavallée, than whom no one expended more pains on researches relating to "Gaston Phœbus," both man and book, it is the coat of the Saint Vallier family, French nobles of very ancient descent. This leaf with the Saint Vallier arms is not quite as old as the rest of the book, for while the text and the illuminations date from the middle of the fifteenth century, the arms are the creation of the second half. How this leaf came there the following account will attempt to show.

The exquisite workmanship of text and illuminations convince one that it must have been made for some very high personage—probably one of the royal princes, or possibly Charles VII. himself. What we know is that about 1470 Aymar de Poitiers, Seigneur of Saint Vallier, married Marie, natural daughter of Louis XI. and of Marguerite de Sassenage; and their son Jean de Poitiers, Seigneur of Saint Vallier, was the father of the famous Diane de Poitiers, the all-powerful mistress of Francis I. and of his son Henry II. It is very probable that our Codex formed part of Louis