

**BOOK-LORE: A MAGAZINE  
DEVOTED TO OLD TIME  
LITERATURE; VOL. V,  
DECEMBER, 1886-MAY, 1887**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649151523

Book-Lore: a magazine devoted to old time literature; Vol. V, December, 1886-May, 1887 by Various

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Cover @ 2017

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**VARIOUS**

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BOOK-LORE.





# BOOK-L O R E.



## THE BOOK TRADE IN THE DARK AGES.

**I**N the article on "The Book Trade in Ancient Rome," attention was called to the incorrectness of many prevalent ideas respecting the mental culture and literary qualifications of the Romans. In addition to pointing out that the poets and historians of the mighty empire were as widely read and as conscientiously applauded, when they deserved it, as any of our modern authors, a comparison was drawn between the cost of production in those early days and in our own times, suggesting the conclusion that we have yet much to learn in the direction of economy, and that although the printing press may have entirely superseded the practice of copying, yet that the latter process had many points in its favour, the most important of which was speed.

When Rome at last yielded the supremacy of the world, and succumbed to the hordes of Barbarians who rushed across the Alps, civilization sustained a terrible shock. It was banished to the remotest parts where the Goth and the Hun did not care to penetrate; and perhaps for the first time in the world's history, luxury and refinement joined hands with nature, freed from that conventionality and effeminacy which wait like attendant sprites on the nation sinking to decay.

The very remembrance of the good old days when, as depicted by the poets, Tityrus tuned his pipe under the shade of a broad-spreading beech-tree, or Father Æneas carried Anchises through the blazing ruins of Troy, was relegated to remote regions far from the Tiber and the isles of Greece, to raise vain regrets in the bosom of some pale Irish monk.

Marius never sat in the midst of such a great desolation as did civilization at this epoch; and though both survive, the former in name and the latter in reality, to our own times, it is simply because they cast away before it was too late every

shred of that false culture which soothes but does not strengthen, and commenced the world anew.

From our own country of Britain, where literature had been raised to the level of a fine art, and the names of Virgil, Homer and Ovid were almost as well known as in Rome itself, the vital spark went out to sea with the last galley that sailed for the West. In those days men were too busy to dream any longer over the eloquence of Demosthenes, too eager to fence themselves off from the riot and turmoil which everywhere prevailed, to take heed of the ethical morality of Epictetus or Antoninus. Force was now the sole arbiter of fortune, and they who were the strongest divided the spoil among them, only to fall out among themselves at last, and grind down with iron heel the struggling thousands upon whose shoulders they had climbed.

While this state of things prevailed, and powerful factors innumerable laid down, each for himself, laws of his own imagining and for his own good, regardless of right and the wishes of his neighbour, it was impossible that anything could flourish but the art of war. It is no wonder that literature came to be despised as the peculiar occupation of those who were too weak or too indolent to defend their homes; and so it happened that, divested of all the honour and dignity of former days, bereft of the crown with which the labour of years had invested her, she crept away into monasteries and a few favoured cities, which, in spite of cancerous corruption, still continued to exist under the shadow of an ancient reputation.

Ultimately those cities, Constantinople among the number, became infected with the prevailing mania for action, and literature was for all practical purposes banished almost entirely from the face of Europe. Things, indeed, came to such a pass that it was only in the extremely restricted circle of jurists and doctors that it had any existence at all; and even within this narrow circumference there were many following a learned profession who could not read the documents they were expected to explain. The few who could read, and the fewer still who had any acquaintance with more than the rudiments of learning, were all housed in monasteries, where scribes were busily engaged in copying such of the works of the ancients as could be procured, handing down, doubtless unconsciously, to succeeding generations inestimable treasures which would most certainly have been altogether lost but for their exertions.

This copying must have gone on for hundreds of years, until by degrees the monks in different parts of Europe commenced to exchange one with the other, by that means acquiring in course of time a fair assortment of books in each monastery; and as manuscripts would in the natural order of events be continually discovered, so we cannot doubt but that this interchange of copies at last assumed extensive proportions.

Literature thus slowly recovered her lost wings, and at last the monks, not content with merely transcribing, commenced to compose diatribes of their own,



as did Gildas, Nennius, and Columbanus, the historians of the sixth century, the "Venerable" Bede, and the almost as well-known Cædmon of the seventh.

Books at this time were rare and very costly, because the art of producing them was, owing to the ignorance and apathy of the public, necessarily confined to a few hands, and also on account of the scarcity of parchment, the only medium as yet employed in the manufacture of books. Those parchments, many of which had been saved from the general ruin, and were therefore of ancient date, were cleaned, and the writing obliterated, to make way for the amateur efforts of monks having a taste for composition; and hence, while we regard the awakening of literature with no small amount of interest and approbation, we cannot help deploring the loss of many works which can never be replaced—cleaned out of existence to make way for some foolish legend or homily.

There were now, as will be seen, two classes of learned monks, one of which merely transcribed, while the other composed for themselves. The former class grew in process of time more and more careful, until at last these manuscripts became in reality works of art and virtue, full of the most splendid miniatures, and not unfrequently adorned with portraits of contemporary celebrities, giving rise to a fresh division of labour in the person of painters—for such they were in reality—who travelled from monastery to monastery filling in blank spaces with emblazoned initials or illustrations.

Hence the art of transcribing became a regular trade, and was paid for according to the extent and rarity of the original, as Kirchoff relates in his *Handschriftenhändler des Mittelalters*, a work published at Leipsic in 1853; though it does not appear that as yet there was, strictly speaking, any actual sale of books. That process grew almost as gradually as the older method of exchange, for it was not until the establishment of Universities, and the consequent demands of students, that books commenced to be sold in the shops; a result to which the general use of paper in the middle of the thirteenth century contributed not a little.

Great results are never achieved but through the narrow road of patience and toil, beset on every side with dangers and difficulties, and the rise of literature from the position of obscurity into which it had fallen was unusually painful and slow. One would have thought that when an ever-increasing body of students were absolutely compelled to possess, at least, some books for the purposes of their daily necessities, the trade of bookselling would have risen to meet the exigencies of the case. This is, however, a mistake, for although a few books were doubtless disposed of to rich students in the way of sale, by far the greater number were merely *lent* by the *Stationarii* in consideration of a certain reward proportionate to the scarcity and consequent value of the volume hired.

The *Stationarii*, so-called in contradistinction to the pedlars or itinerant booksellers who had no place of business beyond the corners of streets and the

public buildings, frequently acted as commission agents as well as book lenders and sellers, and were, on the Continent at any rate, entirely under the control of the Universities. These bodies, judging from the rules and regulations they thought fit to publish from time to time, seem to have done all that lay in their power to hamper and distress the *Stationarii* and their customers. For instance, in 1275, the University of Paris compelled every *Stationarius* to take the oath of allegiance, and enacted that no dealer should either buy himself or get anyone else to buy a book left in his hands for sale, unless he had had it in his possession for at least a month. He must, moreover, exhibit every book at once, announcing the title and price in legible letters, and under pain of heavy pecuniary penalties; and if this book had been left in his hands for sale on commission, he was forbidden to receive the money, and had no alternative but to send for the owner to accept payment of the agreed price.

For some occult reason, a Jew could not sell a book at all, although he might employ a *Stationarius* to sell it for him; pedlars who had no fixed place of business and no license from the University, could not sell any book for more than ten sous; and no book of any description whatever could be taken out of Paris without a special permit.

No wonder that literature felt itself to be cribbed and confined by the multitude of safeguards with which it was encircled, and that not a single book beyond the ordinary school primer was accessible to the poor student; for it was another law that no one could make a copy of any work for himself without first depositing the value thereof in the hands of the Stationer, an outlay which necessitated a capacious and well-filled purse. Notwithstanding many arbitrary and, as we may perhaps think, wholly unnecessary restrictions, the buying, selling, lending, and copying of manuscripts continued to make slow but sure headway, and at the beginning of the fourteenth century there were in Paris over 24 professional scribes, 17 bookbinders, 19 parchment-dealers, 13 illuminators, and 8 booksellers; and fifty years later, Milan, comparatively speaking a small town, had no less than 40 transcribers. These figures show that the intellectual ferment was at last beginning to work, not only in capital cities but in the smaller towns; as for example at Bologna, where the *Stationarii* occupied perhaps the highest position of all, since they guaranteed the correctness of the manuscripts they sold, and were therefore men of varied accomplishments and frequently of great erudition.

The printing press inaugurated a complete revolution in the trade of bookselling, and although the practice of copying from manuscripts, and occasionally even from printed books, continued in active operation until the sixteenth century was almost run out, the trade gradually placed itself upon the footing it now occupies. In our day it is practically unfettered, although in times past even in England it was subject to many rules, some of which were almost as harsh and unreasonable as those formed by the University of Paris in

bygone days. Milton struggled hard against the censorship exercised over the press, but in spite of a continuous opposition on the part not only of Milton but of most educated men, various rules more or less irritating continued to prevail until a few years ago. At present, the only interference with the right of a British subject to publish what he likes, how, when and where he likes, is the supervision exercised by the Lord Chamberlain with regard to pieces intended for the stage. As for the booksellers, they are absolutely free in every respect to sell their goods for what they can obtain, and so long as they do not interfere with the fundamental axiom of the Law of Copyright, and indeed of every other law as well, that no person can be permitted to take with impunity the property of another, they are in a position to trade on their own terms free from the interference and control of any authority whatever.

This seems only right and proper, but it is a right, nevertheless, which has only been conceded after three hundred years of agitation, it being that length of time since the labours of Aldus, Froben and Estienne finally established the supremacy of type.

SOME THOUGHTS ON CLASSIFICATION.

By F. M. CRUNDEN.

CLASSIFICATION is vexation,  
Shelf-numbering is as bad;  
The rule of D  
Doth puzzle me;  
Mnemonics drives me mad.  
*(Old song.—Adapted.)*

AIR—*The Lord Chancellor's Song.*

WHEN first I became a librarian,  
Says I to myself, says I,  
I'll learn all their systems as fast as I can,  
Says I to myself, says I;  
The Cutter, the Dewey, the Schwartz, and the Poole,  
The alphabet, numeral, mnemonic rule,  
The old, and the new, and the eclectic school,  
Says I to myself, says I.  
Class-numbers, shelf-numbers, book-numbers, too,  
Says I to myself, says I,  
I'll study them all, and I'll learn them clear thro',  
Says I to myself, says I;  
I'll find what is good, and what's better and best,  
And I'll put two or three to a practical test;  
And then—if I've time—I will take a short rest,  
Says I to myself, says I.  
But art it is long and time it doth fly,  
Says I to myself, says I,  
And three or four years have already passed by,  
Says I to myself, says I;  
And yet on those systems I'm not at all clear,  
While new combinations forever appear;  
To master them all is a life-work I fear,  
Says I to myself, says I.