

**BOOK COLLECTING,
A GUIDE FOR
AMATEURS**

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Book Collecting, a Guide for Amateurs by J. H. Slater

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A GUIDE FOR AMATEURS

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The Library Manual; Engravings and their Value; The Law
relating to Copyright and Trade Marks, etc., etc.*



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From the *Quintilian* of Vascoan, folio, Paris, 1538.



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CHAPTER I.

AN ANCIENT MANUSCRIPT—THE LIBRARY OF THE MEMNONIUM
—THE ALEXANDRIAN LIBRARY—GREECE AND ROME—
MONASTIC MANUSCRIPTS—THE DISCOVERY OF PRINTING—
THE BOOK HUNTERS OF THE PAST—THE BOOK HUNTERS
OF TO-DAY—BIBLIOGRAPHICAL AIDS.

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THE Bibliophile, as he is somewhat pedantically termed, probably dates his existence from the time when books began to be multiplied in sufficient quantities to render the acquisition of duplicate copies by the public a matter of possibility, but his opportunities of amassing a large number of volumes can hardly be said to have arisen until many years after the invention of printing.

The most ancient manuscript extant has been identified with the reign of Amenophis, who ruled in Egypt no less than 1600 years before the Christian era, and this manuscript, old as it is, shows such superior execution that there can be little, if any, doubt that calligraphy in its oldest—that is, its hieroglyphic—form must be referred for its origin to a period still more remote. Diodorus Siculus relates that Rameses II. founded a library in one of the chambers of the Memnonium at Thebes, and deposited therein the 42 sacred books of Thoth, which had they been in existence now would be nearly 5000 years old. In those days, however, education was looked upon as the peculiar property of the priesthood; the library had sealed doors; even the very books themselves must have been wholly unintelligible to all but the favoured few whose duty it was to preserve them with religious care. All the early Egyptian manuscripts extant have served in their day an ecclesiastical rather than a secular object, and all of them abound with mythological stories more or less recondite. To

use the art of writing for any less sacred purpose would have been held disrespectful to the educated class and resented accordingly. Ptolemy Sotor, who reigned over Egypt about the year 280 B.C., appears to have been the first to break through the artificial barrier which the priestcraft of age upon age had succeeded in building up; and his magnificent twin library at Alexandria, known as the Bruchium and Serapeum, which was partly stocked with the confiscated books of travellers who touched at the port, became in course of time the most famous in the world, and would most probably have been so at this day had it not been destroyed by Theodosius and his army, as a sacrifice at the shrine of ignorance and superstition. With the destruction of the library at Alexandria, containing, as it did, books which can never be replaced, the literary importance of the Egyptians came to an end; thenceforward all that remained was the consciousness of having instructed others better able to preserve their independence than they were themselves. Yet after all it is somewhat extraordinary that Egypt should have been not merely the first to encourage a love of literature, but also the last; for simultaneously with the destruction of the Bruchium and Serapeum were ushered in the first centuries of the dark ages, when the ability to read and write was looked upon as unworthy the status of a free man, unless indeed he were a priest, and when fire and sword were brought into requisition for the purpose of annihilating everything that suggested mental culture.

In the eras which intervened between the reign of Rameses the Constructor and that of Theodosius the Destroyer, Pisistratus had founded his public library at Athens, and collected the poems of Homer which had previously been scattered in detached portions throughout Greece; and Plato, the prince of ancient book hunters, had given no less than 100 attic minæ—nearly £300 of our money—for three small treatises of Philolaus the Pythagorean. Aristotle too, unless he has been sadly maligned, thought 300 minæ a fair exchange for a little pile of books which had formerly belonged to Speusippus, thereby setting an example to that French king of after ages who pawned his gold and silver plate to obtain means wherewith to purchase a coveted copy of Lacerlius, as Gabriel Naudé calls the great Epicurean biographer. In Rome also Lucullus had furnished his house with books and thrown

open his doors to all who wished to consult them. Atticus the famous publisher had turned out a thousand copies of the second book of Martial's *Epigrams*, with its 540 lines of verse, bound and endorsed in the space of a single hour, and the booksellers carried on a flourishing trade in their shops in the Argeletum and the Vicus Sandalarius, exhibiting catalogues on the side posts of their doors exactly as the second-hand dealers in London and elsewhere do now. Of all this vast enterprise of Greece and Rome not a trace remains: only the sepulchral writings of mother Egypt and the clay tablets of Assyria.

History tells us how the luxurious rich of Athens and Rome regarded their books as so many pieces of furniture, and engaged learned slaves to read aloud at their banquets; and if the example of Plato were followed to any extent, doubtless large sums of money were spent on rare originals which had passed through the hands of a succession of dilettanti, and acquired thereby a reputation for genuineness, which they could not have gained in any other manner. Seneca indeed ridicules the vulgar emulation which prompted some of his contemporaries to collect volumes of which, he says, they knew nothing except the outsides, many of them possibly barely that. It has been ever so: in England to-day there are many who would have felt the lash of Nero's tutor across their shoulders.

When the public no longer took pleasure in mental culture, and the whole world was overrun with hordes of barbarians intent upon destruction, learning of every kind was banished to the monasteries, and the monks became the only book lovers, making it their business to transcribe, generation after generation, the volumes which had been saved from the general conflagration. It is entirely through their efforts that the old classics have been preserved to our day; we have to thank them, and them alone, for the preservation of the Bible itself. Even in the monasteries, however, the same spirit of emulation which had prompted Greek to compete with Greek, and Roman with Roman, became apparent in course of time. Ordinary transcripts, though never numerous, began to be looked upon as hardly pretentious enough, and the larger houses established *scriptoria*, where trained monks sat the livelong day, painfully tracing letter after letter on the purest vellum, while Bibliolatrists added illuminated borders and miniatures in a style that would task the skill of our best artists of to-day. This

competition led to the exchange of manuscripts, or to their loan for a brief period, so that by degrees monastic libraries assumed large proportions, numbering many hundreds of neatly bound volumes, which, on being opened, looked as though printed, so accurately and carefully had the copying been done. This explains how Fust, the inventor, or one of the inventors, of printing, was enabled to deceive the people of Paris, for he flooded the market there with printed copies of the Bible which he sold for 50 crowns each, instead of for 400 or 500 crowns, which would have been a fair price had they been in manuscript. The book buyers of Paris *thought they were in manuscript*, until the recurrence of one or two defective types cast from the same matrix caused an inquiry. Fust was arrested, not for the fraud but for witchcraft, and to save his life he explained his process. Thus did the old order give place to the new.

In a very few years after the discovery of Fust's secret the whole of the western portion of Europe was dotted with printing presses. Before 1499 there were 236 in operation; and six years after Gutenberg had completed his Bible of 42 lines there were no less than 50 German cities and towns in which presses had been established. Considering that this only brings us down to about the year 1462, it is evident with what rapidity the art of printing was seized upon through the length and breadth of the country of its probable origin.

In 1475 our own famous printer Caxton was being instructed in the office of Colard Mansion at Bruges, and in 1477, if not earlier,* he settled as a printer at Westminster, thus laying the foundation of our English industry and establishing a native press which has continued to grow year by year until it has assumed its present enormous proportions. Authorities, however, point out that improvement in the art of printing did not come by age or experience, for, curiously enough, the science—for such it really is—was almost perfect from its origin, and, so far as this country is concerned, has distinctly deteriorated since the death of Caxton and his pupils Wynkyn de Worde, Faques, and Pynson. The typefounders of that early period

* *The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*, Caxton's first book which bears a date, was finished in November, 1477; and it is upon the strength of this that the Caxton Quarcentenary Festival was held in 1877. There can be little doubt, however, that he printed many books of which no copies remain, some of which were probably earlier than *The Dictes*.

were as expert as many at the present day and immeasurably superior to most. The greatest care appears to have been exercised in the casting, and competition did not engender the slovenly haste which is only too apparent in many of our modern publications. It is probable that, simultaneously with the introduction of printing into England, a certain limited few, most likely ecclesiastics and powerful nobles, would commence to collect works from the press of Caxton, and subsequently from the foreign presses. In 1545 the Earl of Warwick's library consisted of 40 printed books, in 1691 that of the Rev. Richard Baxter of 1448. It is not until a comparatively modern period that any single man has been able to mass together thousands of volumes during the course of a single lifetime, for it is only recently that printing has been used on every trivial occasion, and in the manufacture of books which would originally have been deemed unworthy of the application of the art.

At the present day books constitute one of the necessities of life and private libraries one of its luxuries. The collector has such ample scope for the exercise of his favourite pursuit that it has long since become a question not so much of accumulating a large number of miscellaneous volumes, as of exercising a rigid discrimination and confining one's attention to works of a certain class, to the almost entire exclusion of all others. Thus, some book hunters collect first, or, at any rate, early, editions of popular modern authors, such, for example, as Dickens, Thackeray, and Lever; others collect old editions of the Scriptures, a few, the expensive early printed volumes which are every year becoming absorbed into the public libraries, and consequently growing more scarce. A small number attempt to form an extensive all-round library, but they rarely, if ever, succeed, partly because life is too short for the purpose, and money too limited in quantity. Occasionally a large collection comes to the auctioneer's hammer, but in nearly every instance it will be found that it represents the labours of several generations of owners, each of whom has contributed the principal publications of his day or taken advantage of any proffered bargain which he may have happened to come across during the course of his lifetime.

The book lover however is not content with mere acquisition, he feels it his duty to know something of the inner life, so to speak, of each volume on his shelf—something,