



***J. HERBERT  
SLATER***

***BOOK COLLECTING:  
A GUIDE FOR  
AMATEURS***

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# Book Collecting: A Guide for Amateurs

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SPINK & SON,

DEALERS IN COINS AND MEDALS,

2, GRACECHURCH STREET, CORNHILL, LONDON, E.C.

E. SUMNER'S

Naturalists' Stores,

135 OXFORD ST., LONDON, W.

E. SUMNER, 135 Oxford Street, London, W.

E. SUMNER'S

Naturalists' Stores.

WATKINS & DONCASTER

Naturalists,

36, STRAND, W.C.

LONDON.

JAMES GARDNER,

29, OXFORD STREET,

EXCHANGED IF NOT APPROVED OF.

29, OXFORD STREET.

# CHAPTER I.

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### **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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**T**HE 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 caligraphy 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 Lacertius, 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 today. 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,[\[1\]](#) 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 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, that is to say, beyond the outside lettering. He wishes to know the chief incidents in the history of the person who wrote it, under what circumstances it was written and why, how many editions have been published, whether the particular copy is perfect, how much it is worth from a pecuniary point of view, and occasionally the nature of the contents. The word "occasionally" may be considered by some as used in an objectionable sense, implying in fact that book lovers are not always in the habit of reading what they possess. Let the collector of Bibles say whether he is in the habit of reading the various editions which he has been at such pains to collect, and it will then be time enough to inquire into the practices of other collectors who, like himself, though in different departments, may not consider themselves justified in spending the amount of time necessary for careful and satisfactory study. In truth, if all books were read, it is only reasonable to suppose that all libraries would be small; and, as we know the contrary to be the fact, we must acknowledge the truth of the main proposition to a very large extent. The happiness of the book lover, as we know him when in the plenitude of his glory, consists by no means in reading, but in the contemplation of his possessions from afar; an inane

treatise on theology becomes the object of his daily prayers when bound in morocco and stamped with the Golden Fleece of Longepierre.

In this short dissertation we have but little to do with the contents of any book. This knowledge can be acquired as circumstances and opportunity offer; we deal rather with extraneous details which are necessary to be known by everyone who aspires to form a collection of books for himself and would know something of the history of each.

Every bibliographer, and also every collector of any eminence, has within reach certain books of reference which experience has shown to be absolutely necessary. Chief among these is Lowndes' *Bibliographer's Manual* of which two editions have been issued. The first was published in 1834; the second in seven parts from 1857-61, with an appendix volume in 1864, having been re-issued from the stereotype plates without a date in 1871. The latter may frequently be picked up at auction sales for about 25s., but there is this peculiarity about the work, that it really would not seem to be very material which edition is purchased. The book is imperfect and full of errors: it cannot be relied on, and the second edition, which was edited by the late Mr. H. G. Bohn, the eminent bookseller, is as untrustworthy as the first edition. The original plan, which has never been departed from, was to give the names of English authors in alphabetical order, placing under each the title of the works he wrote, with the date of each edition, number of volumes, in many cases the collation, and finally the sums realised at auction. Nothing fluctuates so greatly as auction values, and it is not surprising, therefore, to find that not a single entry



in Lowndes under this head can be accepted at the present day. Some of the variations between past and present prices are ludicrous in the extreme, and there is no doubt that anyone who attempted to obtain his knowledge of the value of books from Lowndes' *Manual* would find himself in possession of a mass of old-time information which would be rather a hindrance to him than otherwise. The *Manual* is useful because it gives a full and tolerably complete list of English authors, and collates many of their works with considerable care; it is, moreover, the authority quoted by cataloguers, and, being a copyright publication, practically bars the way to any rival work on the same subject. For these and other reasons it is indispensable.

To ascertain the value of a book is an exceedingly difficult operation; in fact, there are many who assert that it is impossible to do so. Booksellers' prices, as disclosed in their catalogues, are not much to go by, for it is notorious that a West End dealer will often charge more than one who is established further East. Again, some London booksellers charge more or less than provincial ones, according to circumstance and the character of their customers. Until recently there were only two ways of becoming an adept in this department, the first and best by practical experience, a method which is not, of course, available to any but dealers and their assistants; and the second, by indexing retail catalogues and striking an average. A third method, that of taking the average of auction sales, was not available until recently, for it is too troublesome, for any save those whose business it is, to attend sales by auction

all day long for nine months out of the twelve, in order to obtain the necessary materials.

In 1886, I conceived the idea of fully reporting all sales of any importance taking place either in London or the provinces, and in December of that year the necessary arrangements were completed, with the modification that for the present, at any rate, no notice was to be taken of any book which did not realise at least 20s. by auction. This publication, the success of which amply demonstrates the necessity for its existence, is named *Book Prices Current*, and already five volumes are published, and a sixth will be ready at the beginning of next year (1893). As a book of this kind would be useless without a full index, the greatest possible care has been taken to make it as complete and as accurate as possible. From *Book Prices Current* a very good idea of the average value of almost any book may be obtained. Careful note of the way in which the particular volume is bound must, of course, be taken, for this, as might be expected, makes a great difference in the price.

The French are supposed to be much better bibliographers than our own countrymen, and if the character of the authoritative works published in either country is a criterion of national merit there cannot be much, if any, doubt that this is so. Lowndes' *Bibliographer's Manual* takes no notice of books published abroad, and, as they are in the majority, it becomes necessary to seek an additional guide. This is afforded by Brunet's *Manuel du Libraire et de l'Amateur de Livres*, published at Paris in 6 vols. from 1860-65, and usually found, with the Appendix on *Géographie*, 1870, and 2 vol. *Supplément*, 1878-80. In its

place it is a much better book than Lowndes', but it is very expensive, frequently bringing as much as £10 and £12 by auction. Here again, however, the values are quite unreliable, and, as in the case of Lowndes', there is no index of subjects whatever. From the three works mentioned very much may undoubtedly be learned about almost any book provided the author's name be known; but as it frequently happened that many authors chose, for reasons satisfactory to themselves, to conceal their names altogether, or in the much commoner instance of the name being forgotten by or unknown to the searcher, an index of subjects becomes a necessity. This is partly supplied by Watt's *Bibliotheca Britannica* in 4 vols. 4to, 1824, two volumes being devoted to authors and two to subjects, there being also cross references from one to the other. This inestimable work occupied the author the greater portion of his life, and is a monument of industry and research. The auction value amounts to £3 within a fraction, this being one of the few books which has a fixed market price all over the kingdom. Good copies in handsome bindings frequently occur, and are worth £4 to £5. The *English Catalogue*, initiated by the late Mr. Sampson Low, is a periodical which makes its appearance annually, and, unlike all the other works I have mentioned, is confined entirely to current literature. The title of every work published during the year is given, with the month in which it was issued, the price, and publisher's name, the whole being arranged in one line under the name of the author. At intervals, which do not appear to be strictly defined, collective editions of these annual catalogues, arranged in one alphabet, are published, as well as of the

indexes of the *titles* which are appended to each annual issue.[2]

It is obvious that a work of this kind must be of the greatest utility, and as the *English Catalogue* is merely a continuation of the *London Catalogue* and the *British Catalogue*, the former of which commenced so far back as the year 1811, it will be seen that a comprehensive view can be taken of the whole range of English literature from that date to the present. The *Catalogue* has not, however, always been so carefully prepared as it is now, and consequently in the earlier days many publications were omitted. When this is the case Lowndes and Watt will be found of material assistance, the latter especially. A complete set of these catalogues, unfortunately, is very difficult to obtain, and as the earlier ones are not indispensable, it may be perhaps advisable to forego them and to commence in 1814. The volumes to be acquired therefore would be *London Catalogue*, 1816-51; *English Catalogue*, 1835-63, 1863-71, 1872-80, 1881-89; with the accompanying subject indexes to the *London Catalogue*, 1814-46; and to the *English Catalogue*, 1835-55, 1856-75, 1874 (*sic*)-80. It will be noticed that the dates sometimes overlap each other, but this is an advantage rather than a drawback. Among the other books frequently consulted by both dealers and amateurs are Mr. Swan Sonnenschein's *The Best Books*; the *Reference Catalogue of Current Literature*, and Halkett & Laing's *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous Literature of Great Britain*, in 4 vols. These are mentioned together because they are essentially subject indexes and the best of their kind.

Sonnenschein's *The Best Books*, already in a second and vastly improved edition, is a comparatively recent publication, in which, under subjects arranged systematically, are placed the best current books, whether ancient or modern, on each subject, with the prices, sizes, publisher's name and dates of the first and last editions of each. There are about 50,000 works included, and they together give a very good idea of all the material in the various departments of research which the specialist is likely to have occasion to read or refer to. Old books are included where they are of actual present-day value to the student. The selection is not, of course, entirely made by the author, as it is impossible for him to have read a hundredth part of the books recommended; most probably the list has been compiled from the works of specialists, the various encyclopædias, and so forth; but however this may be, it is a very useful one in the hands of a person capable of discrimination (towards which the numerous critical and bibliographical notes and the system of asterisks are a great help), especially if he live near one or other of the large libraries now springing up in different parts of the country.

The *Reference Catalogue of Current Literature*, a cumbrous and unwieldy tome, the last issue of which was out of print within a couple of months of its publication, consists of a large number of publishers' catalogues arranged in alphabetical order. Each work mentioned is indexed, and this has been accomplished so fully and accurately that almost any book to be bought new in the market makes its appearance here.

Halkett & Laing's *Dictionary* is, as the title implies, a record of the anonymous and pseudonymous literature of Great Britain. If an author wrote under an assumed name or anonymously, his real name will be found here, together with a short account of his publications. This work can hardly be said to be indispensable, but it is, notwithstanding, exceedingly useful, and well worth the three and a half guineas which will have to be expended upon it.

Among other works which at one time were thought more of than they are now is Quaritch's *Catalogue of Books*, in one thick volume, 1880, and a supplement which is back-dated 1875-7. The chief value of this lay not only in the prices, which were, as in every other bookseller's catalogue, appended to the items, but in the extraordinary number of the entries, which cover the whole range of British and foreign literature. Even now the work is useful, but there is no doubt that it is gradually decreasing in importance, owing to the high-class works of reference which have lately made their appearance. As to values, *Book Prices Current* gives them much more satisfactorily than any bookseller can pretend or afford to do, while most of the bibliographical notes and references are to be found in one or other of the works I have mentioned.

The collector who, as yet, is not sufficiently advanced to fully realise the difficulties he will have to surmount before he can bring together a judicious assortment of books, will at any rate begin to see that the knowledge requisite to enable him to do so is of no mean order. The preliminaries will take him a long time to master, and he will find that the