

**WHEATLEY
HENRY
BENJAMIN**

PRICES OF BOOKS

Henry Wheatley

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*Prices of Books / An Inquiry into the Changes in the Price of Books which
have occurred in England at different Periods:*

Содержание

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION	4
PREFACE	10
CHAPTER I	12
CHAPTER II	37
AUCTIONEERS	48
CHAPTER III	61
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	70

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The history of prices is one of the most interesting subjects that can engage research. As language has been called fossil poetry, from which the primitive workings of the mind of man may be elicited, so the story of his progress in material well-being lies enfolded in the history of the prices which have at various periods been procurable for commodities, whether of prime necessity, of general utility, or simply ornamental. The prices of books, so ably investigated and recorded by Mr. Wheatley in the following pages, are a small but significant department of a great subject. If we had no record of the price of any other article of commerce, we should still perceive in them an index to the

world's advance in wealth, taste, and general intelligence. With every allowance for the fall in the value of money, it would yet be manifest that prices could now be afforded for books which at an earlier period would have been out of the question; and not less so that while some classes of books had risen in worth with the enhanced standard of wealth, others had accommodated themselves to the requirements of the poor. We should trace the effect of mechanical improvements in diminishing the prices of things, and of fashion and curiosity in augmenting them. We should see the enormous influence of scarcity in forcing up the value of products, while we should learn at the same time that this was not the sole agent, but that intrinsic merit must usually to some extent co-operate with it, and that prices must bear some relation to the inherent reason of things. It must, for instance, have been entirely unforeseen by the early printers that the books which they advertised with such exultation as cheaper than the manuscripts they were superseding would in process of time become dearer, but we can discern this metamorphosis of relative value to have been rational and inevitable. Finally, the fluctuations of price would afford a clue to the intellectual condition of the age. Observing, for example, the great decline which, as a rule, has taken place in the value of early editions of the classics, we should conclude that either the classical writers were less generally esteemed than formerly, or that such progress had been made in their study that the old editions had become inadequate; and both conclusions would be well founded.

Books occupy a middle position between ordinary products and works of art. Like the latter, they are in theory the offspring of an exceptional talent. The humblest bookman views himself as in some measure the superior of his readers for the time being; he would have no excuse for addressing them if he did not suppose himself able to convey to them some pleasure which they could not have attained without him, or to inform them of something, however insignificant, which but for him would have remained unknown. But whereas in the arts price is usually in the ratio of the real or supposed intellectual merit of the production, in books it may almost be said that the reverse rule obtains. The fine picture or statue cannot be reproduced as an original work; copies may be made to any extent, but no amount of copying impairs the value of the unique original. Again, such a work, whether absolutely perfect or not, once finished is complete for all time, and allows of no further improvement. But the book admits of indefinite multiplication, and the extent to which this proceeds is commonly in the ratio of its intellectual worth. It is the very greatest authors, the Homers, the Shakespeares, that are usually the easiest and cheapest to procure.

It appears, therefore, that, although great books unquestionably demand more intellectual power for their production than great works of art, their very superiority tends to cheapen them in comparison by encouraging their dissemination. There could not be a stronger instance of the power of scarcity in determining price; and, in fact, the rarity of a book is the most

important element in its commercial worth. Yet intrinsic desert plays its part, though an inferior one. There are some cases in which it utterly fails. The commercial value of the productions of the Dutch prototypographers, for example, would probably not be augmented in the least if they could be transformed from fragments of dull lesson-books into leaves from sages and poets. The Papal Bulls relating to the Turks in Cyprus, which have the honour to be the first documents to have issued complete from an European press, would hardly gain in commercial value if they were briefs announcing the foundation of the Vatican Library, or official announcements of the fall of Constantinople. On the other hand, the first edition of Virgil, one of the rarest of books, would assuredly be less valued if, while equally rare, it were the *editio princeps* of a Latin author of inferior reputation. In general, the celebrity of an author will be found a considerable factor in determining the value of a book; but while rarity without celebrity will effect much, celebrity without rarity, or some other adventitious circumstance devoid of relation to the intellectual value of the book, will effect very little.

Many other circumstances besides scarcity will contribute to render a book highly prized, and consequently dear. Some of these are obvious at once, such as fine paper, fine print, fine binding, or the autograph of a celebrated man. A book will be valued because it has been the subject of a judicial condemnation, or because it is a copy containing a plate in general deficient or mutilated, or perhaps only because it has

an erratum corrected in other copies. Mr. Sidney Lee's recent discovery of a unique peculiarity in the Baroness Burdett-Coutts' Shakespeare folio may probably have doubled the value of the book. Sometimes such causes are very singular. King Charles the First dropped a pamphlet into the mud; the stain remains to this day, and centuples the value of a tract which would have been only deteriorated if it had slipped from the fingers of a lord-in-waiting. Such a fact introduces the element of sentiment, a powerful factor, and one of far-reaching influence; for the Quaker or Freemason who collects literature interesting to his society, or the local patriot who buys up the books printed in his native town, sets others upon collecting them too, and raises the value all round. Next to scarcity and great beauty, nothing, perhaps, imparts such stability to the worth of a book as to be addressed to a small but well-defined circle of readers. Books on chess and angling are familiar instances. They are not too numerous to dismay a collector, and every one differs from the rest in some feature sufficient to make it indispensable to a collector ambitious of completeness.

A certain description of books would excite lively interest if they could be identified with certainty, those which are not valuable now, but which are about to be. It may probably be considered that almost any book which can manage to exist for five hundred years will find itself augmented in value at the end of this period, but some classes will have proved much better investments than others. Two may be signalised with

considerable confidence—illustrated books, which portray the fashions and humours of the age for posterity, and newspapers. Nothing grows in value like a newspaper; the sheets of to-day, which, perhaps, contain nothing of interest to any contemporary reader, will be priceless to the historian and antiquary of the centuries to come. They fructify in silence, and imperceptibly make their possessor rich. Their intellectual as well as their pecuniary value augments by lying still. Nothing so faithfully depicts an age for its successors; they are worth all the histories and all the novels. Their preservation—which involves their assemblage in one place for the sake of accessibility and of comparison with each other and with books—is a momentous trust, neglect of which would strike a heavy blow at historical, archæological, and sociological research, and inflict a grievous injury upon the ages to come.

R. GARNETT.

March 1898.

PREFACE

The subject of the prices of books is one which always exercises a certain fascination over the minds of book-lovers, although some have expressed their objection to any discussion of it, lest this should have the effect of enhancing prices.

In a single volume it is impossible to deal with so large a subject in any fulness of detail, and I have therefore endeavoured to give a general view, merely instancing a few cases in illustration of the whole, but making an exception in respect of two of the most interesting and high-priced classes of books in literature, namely, the productions of the press of Caxton, and the original editions of Shakespeare's works.

It is necessary for the reader to bear two points in mind—

(1) That the value of money has changed during each century of our history to an extent not easy to calculate with precision, because the prices of all articles have not been equally affected. We can say generally that definite incomes a hundred years ago were equivalent in worth to twice their nominal amount at the present day, and that those of two hundred years ago would be worth about five times as much. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries money was worth ten or twelve times what it is now, but there is some difficulty in calculating correctly the rates respectively of necessaries and luxuries. This is a matter for experts, and cannot be more than alluded to here, as a warning

to the reader that he must always remember that a pound or a shilling in previous centuries was of more value than it is to-day, and possessed a much greater purchasing power.

(2) That in dealing with prices we are interested with rare and specially valuable books. Ordinary standard books, even in good editions, were never cheaper than at present.

A writer of a work of this kind must feel grateful to predecessors, who have made it possible for him to gather satisfactory material for his purpose. Special gratitude is due to Thomas Frognall Dibdin, Hartwell Horne, and William Clarke (author of the *Repertorium Bibliographicum*), who were all thorough workers in this field. The labours of Dibdin have been unjustly depreciated by many modern writers. His works, besides being among the most beautiful books produced in Europe, are mines of bibliographical anecdote and useful literary information. Objections may be made by some to his descriptions, but he certainly greatly influenced the bibliomania of a former age, and made many sales famous which otherwise would have been forgotten except by the few.

There is a gap in the literature of our subject between authors at the beginning of the century and the modern writers, who largely obtain their information from French sources.

H. B. W.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The treatment of such a subject as the Prices of Books necessarily obliges us to range over a wide field, for books have been bought and sold far back in the historical period, and to books, both manuscript and printed, we have to refer largely for records of the past. It is, however, only possible in the space at our disposal to take a very general view of the subject; and it is to be hoped that, in recording the main points in the vicissitudes of prices, the information may not be deemed too desultory to be serviceable.

We might go back to the earliest times, even to Job's famous exclamation, but for our present purpose there would not be much advantage in roaming in this early period, as the results to be recorded would partake more of an archæological, than of a practical character. There is very little chance of a copy of the first book of Martial's Epigrams (which, when first composed by the author, cost at Rome about three shillings and sixpence of our money) coming to auction, so that we are not likely to be able to record its present value.

A consideration of the subject opens up a large number of interesting subjects, which can only casually be alluded to, such as the position of authors, and their remuneration.

For several centuries monasteries were the chief producers of literature, and it seems probable that it was worth the while of the chiefs of some of these literary manufactories to pay a poet such as Chaucer something for a new Canterbury Tale, which they could copy and distribute over the country. We know by the number of manuscripts, and the different order in these, that several establishments were employed in the production of the manuscripts, and we may guess that there would probably be competition among them, which would naturally result in a settlement of some terms of payment.

In the early times it was only rich men who could afford to collect books. Amongst these, one of the most distinguished was Richard de Bury, Bishop of Durham, Treasurer and Chancellor of Edward III., who collected everything, and spared no cost in the maintenance of a staff of copyists and illuminators in his own household. Not only was he a collector (whose books, however, have been dispersed), but he was the author of an interesting relic of that devotion to an ennobling pursuit, the famous *Philobiblon*. This book had never been satisfactorily produced until the late Mr. Ernest Thomas issued in 1888 an admirable edition, founded on a collation of many manuscripts, and a spirited translation.¹ This work occupied Mr. Thomas several years, and before he completed it he saw reason to doubt

¹ A still more elaborate edition was published by the Grolier Club in 1889. This was edited by Professor A. F. West, and printed in three volumes small quarto. It was issued in a small edition, and a sight of it is therefore difficult to obtain.

the high literary position which had been universally accorded to the author; and his opinion was confirmed by an unpublished passage in a manuscript of the *Chronicon sui temporis* of Adam de Murimuth, to which he was referred by Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, where Adam characterised the bishop in very harsh terms. Mr. Thomas published in "The Library" (vol. i. p. 335) an article entitled, "Was Richard de Bury an Impostor?" In this he expressed the opinion that Richard Aungerville—

(1) Was *not* an excellent bishop, *but* an ambitious self-seeker, who bought his way to preferment.

(2) Was *not* a scholar and patron of scholars, *but* merely a collector of books, that he might appear as a scholar.

(3) *Did not* bestow his collections on Durham College, Oxford, as he expressed his intention of doing; *but* that these collections were sold to pay debts incurred by his ostentatious extravagance.

(4) *Did not* write *Philobiblon*. The authorship was claimed for Robert Holkot, a Dominican, who for some time was a member of the bishop's household.

It is certain that the evidence is such as to force us to lower our estimate of the prelate's merits, but these four charges are certainly not all proved. He may not have been so learned and so unselfish a lover of books as was supposed, but there is no satisfactory reason for depriving him of the credit of being the author of the *Philobiblon*.

Mr. Thomas shows that Richard de Bury was born on 24th January 1287, and not 1281, as stated in the "Dictionary of

National Biography.” He completed the *Philobiblon*, and on the 14th April of the same year *Dominus Ricardus de Bury migravit ad Dominum*.

A singularly appropriate chapter from the earliest “book about books” may here be quoted:—

“What we are to Think of the Price in The Buying of Books

(Chapter III. of the *Philobiblon* of Richard de Bury.²)

“From what has been said we draw this corollary, welcome to us, but (as we believe) acceptable to few; namely, that no dearness of price ought to hinder a man from the buying of books, if he has the money that is demanded for them, unless it be to withstand the malice of the seller, or to await a more favourable opportunity of buying. For if it is wisdom only that makes the price of books, which is an infinite treasure to mankind, and if the value of books is unspeakable, as the premises show, how shall the bargain be shown to be dear where an infinite good is being bought? Wherefore that books are to be gladly bought and unwillingly sold, Solomon, the sun of men, exhorts in the *Proverbs*: *Buy the truth*, he says, and

² From Ernest C. Thomas’s translation, 1888.

sell not wisdom. But what we are trying to show by rhetoric or logic, let us prove by examples from history. The arch-philosopher Aristotle, whom Averroes regards as the law of Nature, bought a few books of Speusippus straightway after his death for seventy-two thousand sesterces. Plato, before him in time, but after him in learning, bought the book of Philolaus the Pythagorean, from which he is said to have taken the *Timæus*, for ten thousand denaries, as Aulus Gellius relates in the *Noctes Atticæ*. Now Aulus Gellius relates this that the foolish may consider how wise men despise money in comparison with books. And on the other hand, that we may know that folly and pride go together, let us here relate the folly of Tarquin the Proud in despising books, as also related by Aulus Gellius. An old woman, utterly unknown, is said to have come to Tarquin the Proud, the seventh King of Rome, offering to sell nine books in which (as she declared) sacred oracles were contained; but she asked an immense sum for them, insomuch that the king said she was mad. In anger she flung three books into the fire, and still asked the same price for the rest. When the king refused it, again she flung three others into the fire, and still asked the same price for the three that were left. At last, astonished beyond measure, Tarquin was glad to pay for three books the same price for which he might have bought nine. The old woman straightway disappeared, and was never seen before or after. These were the Sibylline books....”

The destruction of libraries, which was common in the Middle

Ages, naturally caused an increase in the value of those which remained. How completely these libraries passed away may be seen by the instance of that which was once preserved in St. Paul's Cathedral, and is noticed by the late Dr. Sparrow Simpson in his "St. Paul's Cathedral Library" (1893). Walter Shirley Clerk founded the library, the catalogue of which (1458) fills eight folio pages in the first edition of Dugdale's "History of St. Paul's." Of all the manuscripts in this catalogue, only three are now known to exist: one is still at St. Paul's, the second is at Aberdeen, and the third at Lambeth.

The British Museum is fortunate in possessing the beautiful library of the Kings and Queens of England since Henry VII., which is full of the most splendid specimens of artistic bindings. What the market value of such literary gems as these may be can scarcely be estimated, and fortunately they are safe from the arising of any occasion which might afford a test of their value. From this library we are able to appreciate the good taste of James I., who, whatever his faults may have been, was certainly a true bibliophile, and to him we owe some of the finest books in the collection.

It may be safely said that few collections of books have been formed under such difficult and trying circumstances as the invaluable Thomason Collection of Civil War Tracts, now happily preserved in the British Museum. Mr. F. Madan has contributed to *Bibliographica* (vol. iii. p. 291) a most valuable article on the labours of the worthy Royalist bookseller, George

Thomason. Thomason commenced in November 1640, when the “Long or Rebel Parliament” began, his great undertaking of collecting all the pamphlets published in England, and he continued it until May 1661. Many of these were printed surreptitiously, and were obtained with the greatest difficulty; in fact, seventy-three of these were in manuscript, “which no man durst then venture to publish without endangering his ruine.” The King and the Cavalier party knew of the existence of the collection, but every endeavour was made to keep the knowledge from the other party. If it were difficult to form the collection, it was still more difficult to preserve it. We are told that, “to prevent the discovery of them, when the army was Northwards, he packed them in several trunks, and, by one or two in a week, sent them to a trusty friend in Surrey, who safely preserved them, and when the army was Westward, and fearing their return that way, they were sent to London again; but the collector durst not keep them, but sent them into Essex, and so according as they lay near danger, still by timely removing them at a great charge, secured them, but continued perfecting the work.” Afterwards, for greater security, they were lodged in the Bodleian Library, and a pretended bargain was made, and a receipt for £1000 given to the University of Oxford, so that “if the Usurper had found them out the University should claim them, who had greater power to struggle for them than a private man.”

On one occasion Charles I. wished to consult a particular pamphlet, and applied to Thomason for the loan of it. In small

quarto vol. 100 is a manuscript note describing the particulars of this interesting loan:—

“Memorandum that Col. Will Legg and Mr. Arthur Treavors were employed by his Mātie K. Charles to gett for his present use, a pamphlet which his Mātie had then occasion to make use of, and not meeting with it, they both came to me, having heard that I did employ my selfe to take up all such things, from the beginning of that Parleмент, and finding it with me, tould me it was for the King’s owne use, I tould them all I had were at his Māties command and service, and withall tould them if I should part with it and loose it, presuming that when his Mātie had done with it, that little account would be made of it, and so I should loose by that losse a limbe of my collection, which I should be very loth to do, well knowing it would be impossible to supplie it if it should happen to be lost, with which answer they returned to his Mātie at Hampton Court (as I take it) and tould him they had found that peece he so much desired and withall how loath he that had it, was to part with, he much fearing its losse; whereupon they were both sent to me againe by his Mātie to tell me that upon the worde of a Kinge (to use their own expressions) he would safely returne it, thereupon immediately by them I sent it to his Mātie, who having done with it, and having it with him when he was going towards the Isle of Wight, let it fall in the durt, and then callinge for the two persons before mentioned (who attended him) delivered it to them, with a charge, as they would answer it another day, that they should both speedily

and safely return it to him, from whom they had received it, and withall to desire the partie to goe on and continue what had begun, which book together with his Māties signification to me by these worthy and faithfull gentlemen I received both speedily and safely. Which volume hath the marke of honor upon it, which no other volume in my collection hath, and very diligently and carefully I continued the same, until the most hapie restoration and coronation of his most gracious mātie Kinge Charles the second whom God long preserve.—George Thomason.”

Here we have surely an interesting instance of the poetry of bibliography.

According to Mr. Madan’s calculation, there are 22,834 pamphlets in about 1983 volumes, and apparently some hundred or so pieces have been lost from the original set. The collection of these pamphlets was made at very considerable expense, and Thomason is said to have refused £4000 for them, “supposing that sum not sufficient to reimburse him.” On his death in 1666 a special trust was appointed under his will to take charge of the collection, and Dr. Thomas Barlow (Bodley’s librarian, 1652 to 1660) was one of the trustees. In 1675 Barlow was appointed Bishop of Lincoln, and in the following year requested the Rev. George Thomason (son of the bookseller) to take over the charge. After many vicissitudes the books were bought for the absurdly small sum of £300 for George III., who presented the collection to the British Museum. It is impossible to guess at the present price of what is practically invaluable.

The famous antiquary Elias Ashmole, whose treasures are now preserved at Oxford in the Ashmolean Museum, records in his Diary some of his purchases, as, on May 1667, "I bought Mr. John Booker's study of books, and gave £140 for them"; and again, on June 12, 1681, "I bought Mr. Lilly's library of books of his widow for £50."³ We can judge of the character of his library by these purchases of the collections of two of his famous astrological friends.

Even in the seventeenth century men began to be frightened at the increase of books, and Sir Thomas Browne in his *Religio Medici* suggested a system of destruction: "Tis not a melancholy *utinam* of my own, but the desires of better heads, that there were a general synod—not to unite the incompatible difference of religion, but—for the benefit of learning, to reduce it, as it lay at first, in a few and solid authors; and to condemn to the fire those swarms and millions of rhapsodies, begotten only to distract and abuse the weaker judgments of scholars, and to maintain the trade and mystery of typographers." If there was reason for this complaint two centuries ago, how much more must there be now! but the project is unworkable, and Time takes the matter in his own hand and destroys. Fortunately the destruction chiefly takes place among books not likely to be missed.

Three of the greatest book collectors of the eighteenth century were Bishop Moore, the Earl of Sunderland, and the Earl of Oxford. Bishop Moore's fine library, which consisted of about

³ Dibdin's *Bibliomania*, Part V.

thirty thousand volumes, was offered in 1714 to Harley, Earl of Oxford, for £8000, but the latter did not accept the offer because the bishop insisted that the earl should pay the money at once, although he was not to receive the books till the collector's death. He would not really have had long to wait, for the bishop died on July 31st of the same year. The library, mainly through the influence of Lord Townshend, was purchased for £6000 by George I., who presented it to the University of Cambridge. This presentation gave rise to two well-known epigrams, which have been frequently misquoted. Dr. Trapp, the first Professor of Poetry at Oxford, expressed the disgust of his University in these lines—

“Contrary methods justly George applies
To govern his two Universities;
To Oxford sent a troop of horse; for why?
That learned body wanted Loyalty.
To Cambridge he sent books, as well discerning
How much that loyal body wanted learning.”

Sir William Browne, the physician, put the Cambridge case in a form which extorted praise from the Oxonian Samuel Johnson

“Contrary methods justly George applies
To govern his two Universities;
And so to Oxford sent a troop of horse,

For Tories hold no argument but force.
To Cambridge Ely's learned troops are sent,
For Whigs admit no force but argument."⁴

When Lord Treasurer Harley recommended Queen Anne to purchase Sir Symonds d'Ewes' manuscripts as the richest collection in England after Sir Robert Cotton's, and to present them to a public library, the Queen answered, "It was no virtue for her, a woman, to prefer, as she did, arts to arms; but while the blood and honour of a nation were at stake in her wars, she could not, till she had secured her *living* subjects an honourable peace, bestow their money upon *dead* letters." Thereupon the Lord Treasurer bought the collection himself for £6000.⁵ The whole collection of the Harleian MSS. (one of the greatest treasures of the British Museum Library), which consists of 7639 volumes, exclusive of 14,236 original rolls, charters, deeds, and other legal instruments, was purchased by Government for £10,000, or only £4000 more than the Earl of Oxford gave for Sir Symonds d'Ewes' manuscripts alone.

The Earl of Sunderland's fine library was for several years housed in the mansion which formerly stood on the site of the Albany in Piccadilly. It was removed to Blenheim in 1749, where it remained till the great sale of 1881-83. Oldys reports that the

⁴ The versions given in Noble's Continuation of Granger are inferior to the above, which were taken from an old MS. by the Rev. Cecil Moore, and are believed by him to be the originals. See "Bibliographer," vol. vi. p. 92.

⁵ William Oldys's "Choice Notes," 1862, p. 38.

King of Denmark offered Lord Sunderland's heirs £30,000 for the library,⁶ and that the great Duchess Sarah of Marlborough was in favour of the offer being accepted, but it was not.

We learn from Hearne's "Remains" that £3000 was offered by the University of Oxford for the noble library of Isaac Vossius, the free-thinking Canon of Windsor, and refused. Hearne adds, "We should have purchased them, and not stood in such a case upon punctilio and niceties, when we are so lavish of our money upon trifles that bring dishonour on the University." The library was taken abroad, and soon afterwards sold to the University of Leyden for the same amount as that previously offered by Oxford (£3000).⁷

Thomas Osborne, the chief bookseller of his time, bought the great Harley library, consisting of about 50,000 volumes of printed books, 41,000 prints, and about 350,000 pamphlets, for £13,000. This seems a small amount for so matchless a collection, but it is not certain that Osborne made a very profitable investment by his purchase. We shall have more to say of the bookseller and the library in the next chapter.

As an instance of the low price of books at this time, the anecdote of Mr. David Papillon's agreement with Osborne may be mentioned here. The contract was that the bookseller should supply Mr. Papillon (who died in 1762) with one hundred pounds' worth of books at threepence apiece, the only conditions

⁶ Ibid. p. 92.

⁷ Bliss's *Reliquiae Hearnianae*, 1869, vol. i. pp. 206, 207.

being that they should be perfect, and that there should be no duplicates. Osborne was at first pleased with his bargain, and sent in a large number of books; but he soon found that it would be impossible to carry out the agreement without great loss, as he was obliged to send in books worth shillings instead of pence. Long before he had supplied the eight thousand volumes required, he begged to be let off the contract.

Things were worse in Russia, where Klostermann, the bookseller to the Imperial Court, sold books by the yard (fifty to one hundred roubles, according to binding). Every courtier who had hopes of a visit from the Empress Catharine was expected to have a library, and as few of them had any literary taste, they bought them at this rate. Sometimes waste-paper books were lettered with the names of celebrated authors.

Authorship could hardly become a profession until after the invention of printing, and even then it was long before a living could be got out of books. Dr. Edward Castell laboured for seventeen years in the compilation of his immense undertaking—the *Lexicon Heptaglotton*, to accompany Walton's Polyglot Bible. During this time he maintained at his own cost as writers seven Englishmen and as many foreigners. All of them died before the work was completed. Besides expending £12,000 of his own money he was obliged to borrow £2000 more, and this not being sufficient, he petitioned Charles II. that a pension might not be the reward of so much labour. Notwithstanding a circular letter from the king recommending the purchase of this work

the author ended his days in poverty, and a great part of the impression was thrown into garrets, where many of the copies were destroyed by damp or rats.

A similar case was that of Thomas Madox, the learned author of the “History of the Exchequer,” who wrote to Dr. Charlett requesting him to get his book into the College Libraries at Oxford, and explaining that the cost of the impression was £400 for paper and print, and as only 481 copies were printed, “when all the books shall be sold I shall be just able to pay the charges with a trifling over-plus.... This affair,” he adds, “has given me much perplexity, and perfectly cured me of scribbling.”⁸

Thomas Hearne was more fortunate, and amassed a small fortune by his publications. One thousand guineas were found in gold in his rooms at St. Edmund Hall after his death. His books were soon out of print, and fetched large prices even in his own lifetime.

Lord Spencer bought the whole of the library of Count Revickzky, a catalogue of which had been privately printed by the original owner at Berlin in 1784. According to Dibdin, when the Count was in England he offered his whole collection to Lord Spencer for a certain round sum to be paid to him immediately, and for a yearly sum by way of annuity. The offer was accepted, and as the Count died soon afterwards, Lord Spencer obtained the library at a cheap rate. The same noble collector offered the Duke di Cassano Serra £500 for two books, viz., the *Juvenal*

⁸ “Letters from the Bodleian,” vol. i. p. 214.

of Ulric Han, and the *Horace* of Arnaldus de Bruxella, Naples, 1474, but the offer was not accepted. In 1820 Lord Spencer bought the whole collection.

The Duke of Devonshire purchased the valuable library of Dr. Thomas Dampier, Bishop of Ely, for nearly £10,000 after the bishop's death in 1812. Dr. Dibdin has printed in his "Reminiscences" (vol. i. p. 363) a list of prices at which Dr. Dampier valued the various classes of books in his library.

Little idea of the prices of books can be obtained from the amounts given for a whole library, but as in future chapters particulars will be printed of the great libraries that have been disposed of by auction, it seemed well to mention here a few instances of libraries that have been sold entire. The greatest of these is the magnificent library of Earl Spencer, which was sold in 1892 to Mrs. Rylands, and has been transferred from Althorpe to Manchester. The exact amount paid for this library has not been announced, but it is supposed to have been about a quarter of a million pounds.

In respect to the history of prices of books, there have been times of inflation and times of depression, just as in the history of prices generally, but it will be seen that in spite of these vicissitudes scarce books have gradually increased in value. The first signs of the growth of *bibliomania* are seen in the sales of Dr. Mead's and Dr. Askew's libraries in the middle of the last century, which aroused a great interest among book collectors.

During the great Napoleonic wars books became very scarce,

because Englishmen were prevented from purchasing on the Continent, but upon the conclusion of the peace there was a steady flow of books into the country.

The Duke of Roxburghe's sale in 1812 was a great event, forming, as it did, an epoch in the history of book collecting, and the widespread fervour of bibliomaniacs may be dated from that period. Great sales followed, and then came the sale of the enormous Heber library, which let out too many books on the market at once. After this there followed a dull time, but a revival came with the Bright sale in 1846 and Stowe sale in 1849, and the Daniel and Corser sales between 1860 and 1870, and the Henry Perkins sale in 1873, were great events. The last few years have been marked by many great sales, those of the Sunderland, the Beckford, and Hamilton Libraries, and the Turner, Gaisford, Crawford, and Ashburnham collections being among the most remarkable. The greatly increased prices obtained for books have induced many proprietors to sell their literary treasures.

It is well to remember that the value of all books is not rising, but that whole classes have fallen in price. Greek and Roman Classics, and the Fathers and Theological Literature generally, have been most markedly depreciated in value.

Fashion guides alterations in the prices of books, just as she does in other less important matters. Thus we find at one time certain books quoted at high prices, which not many years afterwards have become drugs in the market. Still, a careful review of the subject will show that fashion is not nearly so potent

as in some other departments, say, for instance, in the case of pictures, which certainly vary in price more than books. In spite, therefore, of signs of variableness, it will be seen that there is a continuous increase of price among certain classes of books which are sure to retain their value, and even to be still more esteemed as time passes.

It may be well to inquire what are some of the causes which lead to an increase in the price, and to distinguish between those which are permanent and those which are ephemeral. The growth of book-collecting in the United States has had a most potent influence, and large purchases made for many years in England have drained off a large number of books, low priced as well as high priced, which will never return to this country. Another cause is the increase of public libraries in Great Britain, and when books are bought for these libraries they are permanently removed from the open market, as they are not when sold to an individual, because his library will most probably eventually come to the hammer. These two causes would be sufficient in themselves to permanently increase the price of scarce books, but there are still others to be mentioned. There has been of late years a greatly increased interest felt in the history of books—in printing, in binding—and increased knowledge has shown the great claims of a large number of books to a higher appreciation than hitherto. Then again, the class of the wealthy who can afford to collect choice libraries has largely increased; and lastly, the belief that the collecting of books is by no means a bad

investment has not been without effect. This last point opens up a very interesting question in ethics, Should a collector look upon his collections as an investment? The late Mr. J. Hill Burton argues very strongly against this view in his "Book-Hunter." He writes—

"The mercenary spirit must not be admitted to a share in the enjoyments of the book-hunter.... If [he] allows money-making, even for those he is to leave behind, to be combined with his pursuit, it loses its fresh relish, its exhilarating influence, and becomes the source of wretched cares and paltry anxieties. When money is the object, let a man speculate or become a miser."...

This is quite true, but we must remember that, after all, increased price is only an outward manifestation of increased public estimation, and it is always satisfactory to know that our opinion has been accepted by the public. The real point seems to be that the collector should use his judgment in respect to price, and not trouble himself whether the market value of individual books goes up or down, for he may be sure that if he buys wisely, the ups and the downs will balance each other. If a fair-sized library is purchased with judgment and knowledge, it cannot fail to become a profitable investment, because good books increase in value by reason of their companionship. All worthless books should therefore be ruthlessly weeded out. For instance, a library of 1000 choice books would probably sell for less with 500 books of little value added to them than if these were ruthlessly

eliminated.

Mr. Andrew Lang writes in his pretty little book, "The Library"—

"When Osborne sold the Harley collection, the scarcest old English books fetched but three or four shillings. If the Wandering Jew had been a collector in the last century, he might have turned a pretty profit by selling his old English books in this age."

But Mr. Lang did not think of a calculation, by which Mr. A. W. Pollard, in an interesting article on "English Booksales, 1676-86" (*Bibliographica*, vol. ii. p. 126), overthrew this view of the possibility of great gains. He writes—

"It is perhaps in accordance with precedent to remark that, by the judicious expenditure of five-and-twenty pounds during the ten years we have reviewed, a library of about two hundred volumes might have been acquired, which would now be cheap at £10,000. But as the £25, if invested at compound interest at five per cent., would now have amounted to nearly a million, it is well for bookmen not to make too much of such mercenary considerations."

This question of price was formerly a delicate one. Thus William Beloe was censured by some collectors for drawing attention to the subject in his "Anecdotes of Literature"; but that this objection is got over now may be seen from the great success of such a valuable annual as the "Book-Prices Current," notwithstanding the complaints of some second-hand

booksellers of injury to their business from its revelation of the real value of their books!

Dibdin mentions a book-collector to whom he was pointed out at the Roxburghe sale, who exclaimed, "Hang him! why did he not publish his book in 1810? My books would have brought double the prices."⁹

Dibdin doubtless influenced the market; and in later times two men have exerted a very special influence in raising the prices of books: these are the late Mr. Henry Stevens and Mr. Bernard Quaritch. The former drew his countrymen's attention to early books printed in and relating to America, and he caused a considerable increase in the price of Americana. But neither of these great book-buyers could have permanently raised the price of books if they had not devoted their attention to books which were well worth these advanced prices. When we deal with books of great beauty and value, and of rare occurrence, which are wanted by several rich book-collectors, it is difficult to say what price is too great for such treasures.

It becomes, therefore, an important matter for the book-collector to consider what are the rules that guide the enhancement of price in books. It is not easy to codify these rules, for varying circumstances alter cases: thus new editions reduce the value of some high-priced books, but have no effect in the case of others; and time supersedes some books, while it enhances the value of others. There are, however, one or two

⁹ Dibdin's "Reminiscences," vol. i. p. 356 (note).

points which may be mentioned as regulating price, for those persons who suppose prices to be altogether erratic are certainly wrong.

What, then, are the chief characteristics of a book which make it valuable? "Uniquity," to use Horace Walpole's word, is one of these; but this is not always sufficient to keep up the price.

Good condition is the grand enhancer of value, and dirty copies of even scarce works are seldom worth much. But nowadays much is done by the artist to improve these books. The leaves can be washed, torn pages can be mended, imperfections can be filled up by fac-similes, and then the whole can be handsomely bound in morocco, so that the owner scarcely knows his book again. Still, however, one difficulty remains in the artistic make-up—a short copy cannot be made into a tall one.

It is useless for the artist to spend his labour upon other than the best books, such as the productions of the early presses, original editions of masterpieces, and works of permanent value in their best possible form, with the authors' final corrections. The only high-priced books which can dispense with interesting contents are specimens of fine bindings; while here again, if the historical binding covers a really valuable book, the two elements of value united will cause a remarkable enhancement of price.

Little need be said as to those books which fetch high prices for a time, and then when fashion alters sink to a much lower level, as it will usually be found that there was no intrinsic value attached to these books, and therefore they were not such as

would be bought by the wise collector at a high price. The fictitious value has usually been attained by a system of limited editions and of judicious advertising. Success in these cases is attained among a class outside the experts in bibliography, and therefore there is no cause for wonder that mistakes are made. Sometimes the depression is caused by the unexpected appearance of several copies of a book, of which one or two copies only were believed to exist.

In considering the probability of high prices being sustained, it must always be borne in mind that the peaceful and prosperous condition of the country is taken for granted. In times of national calamity little money is available for luxuries. Two other important points must be remembered. (1) That it is of no use for a book to be scarce if nobody wants it. The money value of the phenomenally dull book mentioned by Sir Walter Scott is not recorded.

“We have heard of one work of fiction so unutterably stupid that the proprietor, diverted by the rarity of the incident, offered the book, which consisted of two volumes duodecimo, handsomely bound, to any person who would declare upon his honour that he had read the whole from beginning to end. But although this offer was made to the passengers on board an Indiaman during a tedious outward-bound voyage, the “Memoirs of Clegg the Clergyman” (such was the title of this unhappy composition) completely baffled the most dull and determined student on board, when the love of glory

prevailed with the boatswain, a man of strong and solid parts, to hazard the attempt, and he actually conquered and carried off the prize.”

(2) That good books are still very cheap, particularly those which it is necessary to possess. So much is talked about the high prices which books fetch, that many are led to believe that he must be a rich man who commences to collect a library; but this is not so, for many good books in good condition can be bought for a few shillings; in fact, some of the best library books, well bound, do not range at more than ten shillings per octavo volume, and this cannot be called a high price. Ordinary collectors must make up their minds to do without Mazarin Bibles and first folios of Shakespeare, and they will find that life can be lived without these expensive luxuries.

In conclusion, it is necessary to strike a note of warning respecting the bad paper which is used for some books, and which render these books quite worthless in a few years. Old books were made to last; the materials used—paper and ink—were of the very best, but many books of the present day are made of bad materials, and contain within them the elements of decay. Lately a German Commission investigated this subject, and for their purpose took out from the Berlin Library one hundred volumes. They classified the paper upon which these books were printed under the four headings of (1) good; (2) medium; (3) bad; (4) very bad. About five books came under the first two classes, and the remainder were about equally divided

between the third and fourth classes. Can we with any confidence claim a better average for English books? If not, the future of our modern books is a dark one.

CHAPTER II

SELLERS OF BOOKS

It has been frequently remarked that a history of bookselling would be a valuable addition to our literature, but such a book would require extensive research. In place of this a history of some booksellers has been produced; but although the volumes of Mr. Curwen and Mr. Roberts are interesting in themselves, they do not go far to fill the vacant space still open for a history of bookselling. Mr. G. H. Putnam has gathered together much curious information in his "Authors and their Public in Ancient Times," and "Books and their Makers during the Middle Ages," which, notwithstanding some errors, form certainly a useful contribution towards this history. The sellers of books have greatly changed their habits with the altered conditions of their trade. Among the Greeks there were public shops for the sale of manuscripts, and in them the learned met together to hear the manuscripts read. In Rome the general mart for books was to be found in the district devoted to the bibliopole, and in his shop advertisements of new works were stuck up.

At the break up of the Roman Empire the producers of books were mostly found in the monasteries, and booksellers were sellers of Paternosters, Aves, &c., as well as of books.

In the thirteenth century the *stationarii* not only sold books,

but accumulated much money by lending them at high rates. Bookstalls were sometimes placed in the church porch, and one of the doors of Rouen Cathedral is still called *le portail des libraires*.

When manuscripts were superseded by printed books the business of selling books naturally became a more important concern, although the London company established by printers and publishers was called the Company of Stationers. At first one man often undertook all the varieties of book production and bookselling, but gradually the four broad divisions of printers, publishers, second-hand booksellers, and auctioneers came into existence.

We know but little of the early publishers, although much attention is now being paid to the lives and works of the old book producers, and we may hope to have in course of time much material for a history of them. The great houses founded in the eighteenth and at the beginning of the present century are still with us, and large additions have been made of late years to the ever-increasing roll. At all events, there is no sign of a failure of published books; whether they are all worthy to be published is another matter.

Great changes have been made in the publishing business, and one of the chief of these is the frequent sale of remainders of new books. It is worth a remark in passing that good books which have been sold off often become scarce and more valuable than those which have only been sold in the ordinary way. James Lackington

was one of the first to make a great business out of the sale of remainders; he was followed by Tegg, and these two men did much to cheapen and popularise literature.

Charles Knight will ever be remembered with honour as the great pioneer in the cheapening of good literature. The excellence of his shilling volumes was a marvel when they were first published, and even now it would be difficult to find their equal. Knight had a great belief in the adequacy of the penny as a price for a number of a book. He published large quantities of books at a penny a number—as one of the first cheap periodicals—the *Penny Magazine*, and the first of cheap encyclopædias—the *Penny Cyclopædia*. How much good has been done by the large issues of such excellent books as Knight's weekly and monthly volumes, the Libraries of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge, Constable's Miscellany, Murray's Family Library, Home and Colonial Library, and Bohn's Libraries!—books all of which are worthy of a place in the library, and not like too many of the cheap books of the present day, books to be read and then thrown aside.

In taking note of some of the old second-hand booksellers, special mention must be made of Joseph Kirton of St. Paul's Churchyard, whose sign was "The King's Arms," because he was Samuel Pepys's bookseller—"my poor Kirton," as the latter calls him when he was ruined by the Fire of London. Pepys tells us that "Kirton was utterly undone by the loss of all his stock, so that from being worth seven or eight thousand pounds, he was

made two or three thousand pounds worse than nothing.” (See “Diary,” October 5, 1666.) The poor bookseller did not live long after his great loss, for he died in October 1667. Pepys records an interesting instance of the rise in price of one of the books burnt in the great fire. On March 20, 1666-67 he writes: “It is strange how Rycaut’s ‘Discourse of Turky,’ which before the fire I was asked but 8s. for, there being all but twenty-two or thereabouts burned, I did now offer 20s., and he demands 50s., and I think I shall give it him, though it be only as a monument of the fire.” On April 8, 1667, he gives us some fuller particulars, which are of interest: “So I away to the Temple, to my new bookseller’s; and there I did agree for Rycaut’s late ‘History of the Turkish Policy,’ which costs me 55s.; whereas it was sold plain before the late fire for 8s., and bound and coloured as this for 20s., for I have bought it finely bound and truly coloured, all the figures, of which there was but six books done so, whereof the King and Duke of York, and Duke of Monmouth and Lord Arlington had four. The fifth was sold, and I have bought the sixth.” There is no copy of this edition in the British Museum.

John Dunton, the erratic bookseller and projector of the eighteenth century, has left us in his “Life and Errors” a most curious account of the booksellers of his time, who are all, oddly enough, either handsome themselves or have beautiful wives. Nearly all are also eminent Christians; in fact, we are told that of three hundred booksellers trading in country towns the author knew not of one knave or blockhead amongst them all.

Thomas Osborne, the most celebrated bookseller of his day, is interesting to us as having had the honour of being knocked down by Dr. Samuel Johnson. Whether or no he deserved such a summary punishment we cannot now tell, but although he appears to have been more of a business man than a literary character, what he did is sufficient to place him in an honourable position in the history of English bibliography. He bought the finest library of the time, and sold it piecemeal at reasonable prices. He employed two of the most capable men of his day—Johnson and Oldys—to make a Catalogue, which does credit to all concerned in its production, and he did not make much money by the transaction. The amount he gave for the Harley library in 1742 (£13,000) was less by £5000 than the binding of a portion of the library had cost, but had he given more he would certainly have been a loser. Osborne projected a Catalogue, in which it was proposed “that the books shall be distributed into distinct classes, and every class arranged with some regard to the age of the writers; that every book shall be accurately described; that the peculiarities of the editions shall be remarked, and observations from the authors of literary history occasionally interspersed, that by this Catalogue posterity may be informed of the excellence and value of this great collection, and thus promote the knowledge of scarce books and elegant editions.” Maittaire drew up the scheme of arrangement, and wrote the Latin dedication to Lord Carteret, who was then Secretary of State. Dr. Johnson wrote the “Proposals” for printing the

Bibliotheca Harleiana, which afterwards were prefixed to the first volume. But in spite of having such eminent helpers, Osborne had to give up his project of an annotated Catalogue, and he informed the public in the preface to the third volume of his failure—

“My original design was, as I have already explained, to publish a methodical and exact Catalogue of this library, upon the plan which has been laid down, as I am informed, by several men of the first rank among the learned. It was intended by those who undertook the work, to make a very exact disposition of all the subjects, and to give an account of the remarkable differences of the editions, and other peculiarities, which make any book eminently valuable; and it was imagined that some improvements might, by pursuing this scheme, be made in Literary History. With this view was the Catalogue begun, when the price [5s. per volume] was fixed upon it in public advertisements; and it cannot be denied that such a Catalogue would have been willingly purchased by those who understood its use. But when a few sheets had been printed, it was discovered that the scheme was impracticable without more hands than could be procured, or more time than the necessity of a speedy sale would allow. The Catalogue was therefore continued without notes, at least in the greatest part; and though it was still performed better than those which are daily offered to the public, fell much below the original intention.”

The public were not very grateful for what they did receive, and resented Osborne's charge of five shillings a volume for

the Catalogue, which seems reasonable enough now, but was then denounced as “an avaricious innovation.” In answer to the clamour the bookseller announced that “those who have paid five shillings shall be allowed at any time within three months after the day of sale either to return them in exchange for books, or to send them back and receive their money.” Another complaint was that the books were priced too high. As this was a serious charge, Osborne got Johnson to put his answer into sonorous language, that would at least make the complainers ashamed of themselves: “If, therefore, I have set a high value upon books, if I have vainly imagined literature to be more fashionable than it really is, or idly hoped to revive a taste well-nigh extinguished, I know not why I should be persecuted with clamour and invective, since I shall only suffer by my mistake, and be obliged to keep those books which I was in hopes of selling.”

Dibdin proves that this charge of over-pricing is quite unjust. He writes: “Whoever inspects Osborne’s Catalogue of 1748 (four years after the Harleian sale) will find in it many of the most valuable of Lord Oxford’s books; and among them a copy of the Aldine Plato of 1513 struck off upon vellum, marked at £21 only—for this identical copy Lord Oxford gave 100 guineas, as Dr. Mead informed Dr. Askew; from the latter of whose collections it was purchased by Dr. Hunter, and is now in the Hunter Museum. There will be found in Osborne’s Catalogues of 1748 and 1753 some of the scarcest books in English literature marked at 2 or 3 or 4s. for which three times the number of *pounds* is now

given.”¹⁰ Dibdin has given a useful analysis of the contents of the Harleian Library in his *Bibliomania*. Osborne published a large number of catalogues full of literary curiosities, and with interesting notes and prefaces. In Mr. Thorpe’s Catalogue of 1851 there is a notice of a set of Osborne’s Catalogues from 1729 to 1768, in forty-three volumes octavo. This famous bookseller died on 27th August 1767, and he is said to have left behind him some forty thousand pounds.

No bookseller has ever been held in higher esteem than Thomas Payne, who was honourably known as “honest Tom Payne.” Payne’s shop at the Mews Gate, where the National Gallery now stands, was for years the great afternoon resort of the chief book collectors. Here met such men as Cracherode, George Steevens, Malone, Lord Spencer, Grenville, Bishop Dampier, Towneley, and Colonel Stanley. Payne lived at the Mews Gate for forty years, having commenced business as an assistant to his elder brother, Oliver Payne. Thomas’s first catalogue, when he set up for himself, is dated 1740. He removed to Pall Mall, and retired from business in 1790. He died in 1799, at the age of eighty-two. He was succeeded by his son, who, in partnership with Henry Foss, carried on a first-rate bookselling business in Pall Mall for many years. The catalogue of the Grenville Library was made and published by them.

George Nicol, styled by Beloe in his *Sexagenarian* “a superb bookseller,” was a man of great influence in his day. He was

¹⁰ *Bibliomania*, Part V.

largely instrumental in the purchase of much of two magnificent libraries—those of George III. and the Duke of Roxburghe—and he was highly esteemed by both his employers. He always spoke of the King as his beloved master. It was he who induced R. H. Evans, the bookseller, to adopt the business of an auctioneer by offering him the sale of the Roxburghe library.

Another bookseller who occupies a prominent position in the roll of learned and high-principled members of the calling was Thomas Rodd, of Great Newport Street. His catalogues were of great interest, and he numbered among his customers most of the book-collectors of his time. Lord Campbell referred to him in one of his books as “that very learned and worthy bookseller, my friend Thomas Rodd.”

A rival of Rodd was Thomas Thorpe, who commenced business in Covent Garden, removed to Piccadilly, and in his later days returned to Covent Garden. Thorpe was a masterful man, who carried everything before him, and published a series of valuable catalogues, from which may be obtained a history of prices for many years. Dibdin, in his “Reminiscences” (1806), says, “I know of no such dogged, indomitable energy and perseverance as that of this renowned biblioplist”; and again, in the preface to his “Library Companion,” he writes, “Mr. Thorpe is indeed a man of might. His achievements at book-sales are occasionally described in the ensuing pages. It is his catalogues I am here to treat. They are never-ceasing productions; thronged with treasures which he has gallantly borne off at the point of his

lance, in many a hard day's fight in the Pall Mall and Waterloo Place arenas. But these conquests are no sooner obtained than the public receives an account of them; and during the last year only, his catalogues in three parts, now before me, comprise not fewer than seventeen thousand nine hundred and fifty-nine articles. What a scale of buying and selling does this fact alone evince! But in this present year two parts have already appeared, containing upwards of twelve thousand articles. Nor is this all. On the 24th day of September, in the year of our Lord 1823, there appeared the most marvellous phenomenon ever witnessed in the annals of bibliopolism. The *Times* newspaper had four of the five columns of its last page occupied by an advertisement of Mr. Thorpe, containing the third part of his catalogue for that year. On a moderate computation this advertisement comprised eleven hundred and twenty lines." Greater things have been done since.

The Bohns were mighty booksellers in their time—John the father, and Henry and James the two sons; but Henry Bohn made the greatest name. His famous Guinea Catalogue ("the guinea pig") was long a marvel, at least in respect to thickness, till Mr. Quaritch decided to far outrival it, and make it appear slim by the side of his huge volumes. Henry Bohn was a remarkable man, and the cultivator of many tastes. In later life he neglected second-hand bookselling for publishing and the selling of remainders. He has already been mentioned as one of the chief of those who have supplied the public with sound cheap

literature. Bohn was fond of exhibiting his importance, and when at a book-sale he would, catalogue in hand, inspect the lots far ahead, and occasionally look up and arrest the course of the sale by inquiring of the auctioneer what was the number of the lot then selling.

Mr. Quaritch has outdone all previous booksellers by the grandeur of his catalogues. They have grown in size and importance, until the last General Catalogue, in seven volumes and nine supplements, a large paper copy of which is in the Reading-room of the British Museum, throws all other catalogues into the shade. The volumes containing the various classes into which the catalogue is divided each form a most valuable bibliography and a grand record of the present prices of books.

This is not a history of booksellers, and therefore more need not be said of them here than that a body of men to whom book collectors are greatly indebted may well be proud of numbering in their ranks those already named, as well as the Pickerings, the Lillys, the Boones, the Ellises, and the Bains, upon whose exploits we have not space to enlarge.

AUCTIONEERS

William Cooper, a bookseller in a good way of business at the sign of the Pelican in Little Britain, was the first to introduce into England the practice of selling books by auction, when in 1676 he sold Dr. Seaman's library, and for some years he was the chief auctioneer in London. His first catalogue—the first sale catalogue in England—is exhibited in the Kings' Library at the British Museum.

In 1680 Edward Millington, a better known man and a bookseller of standing, took to auctioneering, and he and Cooper together divided the chief business in this department. Other booksellers, such as Moses Pitt, Zachary Bourne, Nathaniel Ranew, Richard Chiswell, and John Dunsmore, Robert Scott, &c., sold books by auction, and Oldys styles Marmaduke Foster, who made the catalogue of Thomason's Civil War Tracts in twelve folio manuscript volumes, an auctioneer. It is, however, of the two foremost men, Cooper and Millington, that we want to know more, and fortunately a wit of Christ Church, Oxford, George Smalridge, afterwards Dean of Christ Church and Bishop of Bristol, was struck by the humours connected with the sale in 1686 of the stock of a bankrupt Oxford bookseller—Richard Davis, the publisher of several of the Hon. Robert Boyle's works. Smalridge wrote a skit on the proceedings, under the title of "Auctio Davisiana Oxonii habita

per Gulielmum Cooper, Edoar. Millingtonum, Bibliop. Lond. ... Londini: Prostant venales apud Jacobum Tonson, 1689." This was reprinted in *Musarum Anglicanarum Analecta*, vol. i. 1691.¹¹

The sale, according to Anthony à Wood, took place "in a large stone fabric opposite St. Michael's Church, in Oxon., near the north gate of the city, called Bocardo" (a prison in the Middle Ages), and apparently it attracted a great deal of attention on account of the novelty of the mode of sale. Smalridge fastened on the salient points, and he has thus given us information respecting the conduct of a sale in the seventeenth century which we should not otherwise have possessed. The persons of the little drama are six Christ Church men—Arthur Kaye, Walter Bacon, Ed. Stradling, George Dixon, Christopher Codrington, and William Woodward—and in the pride of their learning they make sad fun of the pomposity and ignorance of the poor auctioneers. We must, however, remember that this is a satire and a caricature. Cooper is described as "a man of wonderful and notable gravity," with a monstrous paunch; and Millington as having a Stentor's lungs and consummate impudence, a very windbag, whose hollow bellows blow lies.

Woodward took the part of Cooper, and Codrington that of Millington, but when these characters were first pressed upon them, the latter urged that "if a book is bad, I cannot pile

¹¹ An annotated translation of *Auctio Davisiana* was published in "Book-Lore," vol. iii. p. 166; vol. iv. p. 1. The translator possesses a copy formerly belonging to Bishop Wordsworth of Lincoln, in which is written, in a contemporary hand, *ex dono Bibliopolæ Ric Davis*.

encomiums on it, and prefer Wither to Virgil, or Merlin to the Sibyls." We are told that bids of one penny were taken, and that when the third blow of the hammer has been struck the sale was irrevocable. The auctioneers seem to have offended the ears of the Oxonians by saying "Nepōtis" and "Stephāni." At the end of the day Woodward is made to say, "I have spoken, I the great Cooper, whose house is in Little Britain." Codrington recites a long rhodomontade ending thus: "I check myself and put a curb on the runaway muses. But this mallet, the badge of my profession, I affix as a dedicatory offering to this post—To Oxford and the Arts Millington consecrates these arms." Dunton draws a favourable portrait of Millington in his "Life and Errors." He says he "commenced and continued auctions upon the authority of Herodotus, who commends that way of sale for the disposal of the most exquisite and finest beauties to their *amorosos*; and further informs the world that the sum so raised was laid out for the portions of those to whom nature had been less kind: so that he'll never be forgotten while his name is Ned, or he, a man of remarkable elocution, wit, sense, and modesty—characters so eminently his, that he would be known by them among a thousand. Millington (from the time he sold Dr. Annesly's library) expressed a particular friendship to me. He was originally a bookseller, which he left off, being better cut out for an auctioneer. He had a quick wit, and a wonderful fluency of speech. There was usually as much comedy in his 'once, twice, thrice,' as can be met with in a modern play. 'Where,'

said Millington, ‘is your generous flame for learning? Who but a sot or a blockhead would have money in his pocket and starve his brains?’ Though I suppose he had but a round of jests, Dr. Cave once bidding too leisurely for a book, says Millington, ‘Is this your “Primitive Christianity?”’ alluding to a book the honest doctor had published under that title. He died in Cambridge, and I hear they bestowed an elegy on his memory, and design to raise a monument to his ashes.” Thomas Hearne does not give him so good a character. He writes under date 13th September 1723: “Though the late Mr. Millington of London, bookseller, was certainly the best auctioneer in the world, being a man of great wit and fluency of speech, and a thorough master of his trade; though, at the same time, very impudent and saucy, yet he could not at the end of the auction, be brought to give an account to the persons who employed him, so that by that means, he allowed what he pleased and no more, and kept a great number of books that were not sold to himself. Whence arose that vast stock of books, though most of them but ordinary, that he had when he dyed, and which, after his death, were sold by auction.”¹²

“An Elegy upon the Lamented Death of Mr. Edward Millington, the famous Auctioneer,” alluded to by Dunton, is printed in the “Works of Mr. Thomas Brown,” ed. 1744, iv. p. 320, but the Rev. C. H. Hartshorne quotes it in his “Book Rarities of Cambridge,” 1829, p. 450, from Bagford’s Collection, British Museum, Harleian MSS., No. 5947. It reads as follows:—

¹² *Reliquiae Hearnianæ*, 1869, vol. ii. p. 172.

“Mourn! mourn! you booksellers, for cruel death
Has robb’d the famous auctioneer of breath:
He’s gone,—he’s gone,—all the great loss deplore;
Great Millington—alas! he is no more:
No more will he now at your service stand
Behind the desk, with mallet in his hand:
No more the value of your books set forth,
And sell ’em by his art for twice the worth.
Methinks I see him still, with smiling look,
Amidst the crowd, and in his hand a book:
Then in a fine, facetious, pleasing way
The author’s genius and his wit display.

O all you scribbling tribe, come, mourn his death,
Whose wit hath given your dying fame new birth.
When your neglected works did mouldering lie
Upon the shelves, and none your books would buy,
How oft has he, with strainèd eloquence,
Affirm’d the leaves contained a world of sense,
When all’s insipid, dull impertinence?
‘Come, gentlemen,—come bid me what you please;
Upon my word it is a curious piece,
Done by a learned hand—and neatly bound:
One pound—once, twice, fifteen: who bids?—a crown!’
Then shakes his head, with an affected frown,
And says ‘For shame! consider, gentlemen,
The book is sold in shops for more than ten.
Good lack a day!—’tis strange!’ then strikes the blow,

And in a feignèd passion bids it go.

Then in his hand another piece he takes,
And in its praise a long harangue he makes;
And tells them that 'tis writ in lofty verse,
One that is out of print and very scarce:
Then with high language, and a stately look,
He sets a lofty price upon the book;
'Five pound, four pound, three pound,' he cries aloud,
And holds it up to expose it to the crowd,
With arm erect,—the bidders to provoke
To raise the price before the impending stroke;
This in the throng does emulation breed,
And makes 'em strive each other to outbid;
While he descants upon their learned heats,
And his facetious dialect repeats:
For none like him, for certain, knew so well
(By way of auction) any goods to sell.
'Tis endless to express the wayes he had
To sell their good, and to put off their bad.
But ah! in vain I strive his fame to spread;
The great, the wise, the knowing man is dead.

And you in painting skill'd, his loss bewail;
He's dead!—that did expose your works to sale.
Can you forget how he for you did bawl,
'Come, put it in?—a fine original,
Done by a curious hand:—What strokes are here,
Drawn to the life? How fine it does appear!

O lovely piece!—Ten pound,—five pound;—for shame,
You do not bid the value of the frame.’
How many pretty stories would he tell
To enhance the price, and make the picture sell!
But now he’s gone!—ah! the sad loss deplore;
Great Millington!—alas! he is no more.
And you, the Muses’ darlings, too, rehearse
Your sorrows for the loss of him in verse:
Mourn! mourn! together, for that tyrant death
Has robb’d the famous auctioneer of breath.”

The Epitaph

Underneath this marble stone
Lies the famous Millington;
A man who through the world did steer
I’ th’ station of an auctioneer;
A man with wondrous sense and wisdom blest,
Whose qualities are not to be exprest.

We have given so much space to Millington, because it is interesting to see how similar were the practices of auctioneers at the first institution of the business to what they are at the present time, and also because Millington seems to have been considered the most famous of auctioneers, until James Christie arose to take his place as chief representative of the profession. It may be

added to his honour that he was a friend of Milton, who lodged in his house.

Richard Chiswell (1639-1711) was more of a bookseller than an auctioneer, but his name must be mentioned here. He was one of the four who issued the fourth folio edition of Shakespeare's Plays, and he was the official publisher of the Votes of the House. Dunton describes him as "the metropolitan bookseller of England, if not of all the world," and says that he never printed a bad book, or one on bad paper.

Jonathan Greenwood, bookseller and auctioneer, is described by Dunton as a worthy but unfortunate man, "so that the chief thing he has left to boast of is a virtuous wife and several small children." He adds, "But he still deserves the love and esteem of all good men, for the worst that can be said of him is, 'There goes a poor honest man,' which is much better than 'There goes a rich knave.'"

How little is known of some of these early auctioneers may be seen from the fact that John Bullord, who sold books at the end of the seventeenth century, is said by the careful John Nichols to be a member of the well-known bookselling family of Ballard. I cannot find any information respecting Bullord, but it is very improbable that this name was merely a misspelling of Ballard.

The name of Samuel Paterson (1728-1802) will always be held in honour among English bibliographers, for he was one of the first to improve the art of cataloguing, and he gained great fame from his labours in this department. He had one great

fault, however, for he was so insatiable a reader, that when in cataloguing he came upon a book he had not seen before, he must needs read the book then, and thus his work was much delayed, and often his catalogues could not be obtained until a few hours before the sale. He was the son of a woollen draper in St. Paul's, Covent Garden, but lost his father when he was only twelve years old; his guardian neglected him, and having involved his property in his own bankruptcy, sent him to France. Here he acquired a considerable knowledge of French literature, which served him in good stead through life. When little more than twenty years of age he opened a shop in the Strand, opposite Durham Yard. This bookselling business was unsuccessful, and he then commenced as a general auctioneer at Essex House. It was during this period of his life that he saved the collection of valuable manuscripts formerly belonging to Sir Julius Cæsar from being sold as waste-paper to a cheesemonger. He classified the MSS., and made an excellent catalogue of them, and when they came to be sold by auction they realised £356. Although Paterson made an excellent auctioneer, he was no more successful financially than in his other ventures. He therefore accepted the post of librarian to the Earl of Shelburne (afterwards first Marquis of Lansdowne); but after a few years there was a quarrel, and he was obliged to return to the business of cataloguing and selling of libraries.

The Rev. C. H. Hartshorne, in his "Book Rarities," mentions a print by Nicholls in the British Museum, called "The Complete Auctioneer," representing a man with spectacles on, standing

at a table covered with books, which are lettered at the tops. Underneath are these lines—

“Come, sirs, and view this famous Library;
’Tis pity learning should discouraged be:
Here’s bookes (that is, if they were but well sold)
I will maintain ’t are worth their weight in gold.
Then bid apace, and break me out of hand:
Ne’er cry you don’t the subject understand.
For this I’ll say—howe’er the case may hit,—
Whoever buys of me—I’ll teach ’em wit.”

Although the London booksellers went into the country to sell books, there were some local auctioneers, as, for instance, Michael Johnson (the father of Dr. Samuel Johnson), who kept a bookstall in Lichfield, and attended the neighbouring towns on market days. Johnson’s address to his customers is taken from “A Catalogue of Choice Books, ... to be sold by auction, or he who bids most, at the Talbot, in Sidbury, Worcester,” and is quoted from Clarke’s *Repertorium Bibliographicum* (1819)—

“To all Gentlemen, Ladies, and Others in or near Worcester,—I have had several auctions in your neighbourhood, as Gloucester, Tewkesbury, Evesham, &c., with success, and am now to address myself and try my fortune with you.—You must not wonder that I begin every Day’s Sale with small and common books; the reason is a room is some time a filling, and persons of address and business, seldom coming first, they are entertainment till we

are full; they are never the last books of the best kind of that sort for ordinary families and young persons, &c. But in the body of the Catalogue you will find Law, Mathematicks, History: and for the learned in Divinity there are Drs. Souter, Taylor, Tillotson, Beveridge, and Flavel, &c., the best of that kind: and to please the Ladies I have added store of fine pictures and paper hangings, and, by the way, I would desire them to take notice that the pictures shall always be put up by the noon of that day they are to be sold, that they may be view'd by day light. I have no more but to wish you pleas'd and myself a good sale, who am

Your Humble Servant,

M. Johnson."

The sale took place in the evening, commencing at six o'clock and continuing till all the lots were sold.

The existing firms of literary auctioneers, Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge; Puttick & Simpson; Christie, Manson & Woods; and Hodgsons, are all of considerable standing, but Sotheby's is of the greatest antiquity. Samuel Baker, the founder of the house, commenced business in 1744 with sale of Dr. Thomas Pellet's library (£859) in York Street, Covent Garden. He continued sole member of the firm till 1774, when he entered into partnership with George Leigh (who is styled by Beloe "the finical bookseller"). Baker died in 1778, in his sixty-sixth year, when he left his property to his nephew, John Sotheby, who in 1780 was in partnership with Leigh. In 1800 the style was Leigh, Sotheby & Son, John Sotheby's son Samuel being taken into

partnership. In 1803 the business was removed from York Street to 145 Strand, opposite Catharine Street, and in 1818 to the present house in Wellington Street. The third and last Sotheby, Mr. Samuel Leigh Sotheby, became a partner in 1837, and in 1843 Mr. John Wilkinson entered the firm as a partner. The style was Sotheby and Wilkinson till 1864, when Mr. Edward Grose Hodge became a partner, and from that date the name of the firm has been Sotheby, Wilkinson, and Hodge.

The firm of Puttick & Simpson dates back to the establishment of the business by Mr. Stewart in 1794 at 191 Piccadilly. The business was bought by Wheatley & Adlard on the retirement of Mr. Stewart. For a short time it was carried on by Mr. Fletcher, who was succeeded in 1846 by Messrs. Puttick & Simpson. In 1858 the business was removed from Piccadilly to 47 Leicester Square. Mr. Puttick died in 1873.

The firm of Christie's was established soon after that of Sotheby's, and James Christie the elder's (1730-1803) first sale was on the 5th December 1766, at rooms in Pall Mall, formerly occupied by the print warehouse of Richard Dalton. Christie afterwards removed next door to Gainsborough, at Schomberg House, and died there, 8th November 1803. His son, James Christie the younger (1773-1831), was born in Pall Mall, and was educated at Eton. In 1824 he removed to the present premises in King Street, formerly Wilson's European Emporium. Mr. Christie died in King Street, 2nd February 1831, aged fifty-eight. Mr. George Christie succeeded his father. Mr. William Manson

died in 1852, and was succeeded by his brother, Mr. Edward Manson. In 1859 Mr. James Christie, the great-grandson of the founder, and Mr. Thomas Woods, joined the firm.

CHAPTER III

PRICES OF MANUSCRIPT BOOKS

In a treatise devoted to an inquiry concerning the varying prices of books, it is necessary that at least one chapter should be devoted to manuscripts. There is no field of investigation which offers a more interesting subject for study, and few that are more difficult to master. Manuscripts are really more attractive than printed books, because they are so various, and have been produced over a much longer period of the world's history. It is therefore strange that so few authors care to trouble themselves about them; that this is so may be seen from the large number of readers at the British Museum who are contented to quote over and over again from the much-used printed books, and the comparatively few who cultivate the virgin soil of the Manuscript Department, where there are endless stores of unused materials.

Manuscripts are usually somewhat miscellaneous in character, for they consist (1) of some of the finest examples of the pictorial art of many ages; (2) of the originals of the great works of antiquity; (3) of a large number of valuable works that have never been printed; (4) of charters, documents, letters, memoranda, &c., which are of great value, but which are not books, and therefore do not come within the scope of our present inquiry. In respect to the prices of the manuscripts, it is very difficult to say

anything of much value, because (1) many of the most important manuscripts have been transferred from library to library in bulk, and it is comparatively seldom that they come up for public sale; (2) the buyers of manuscripts are fewer than those of printed books, and therefore it is more difficult to arrive at a real standard price for books which are practically unique, as there is no wide public opinion upon the subject. But for the present purpose, a still more important reason why this vast subject cannot be dealt with in a succinct manner is, that the materials for its history have not yet been thoroughly investigated by experts. The relative prices at different periods are hard to understand, even in England, where money has been better regulated than in most countries; but when we have to deal with foreign countries and foreign coins, we are necessarily at a loss how to convert into their present value coins which may have been depreciated at the time we are dealing with, and have certainly been still more depreciated since: for instance, what idea is communicated to the mind of the modern reader when he is told that “Borso d’Este paid forty ducats for a *Josephus* and a *Quintus Curtius*, while his large two-volume Bible cost him 1375 sequins”?¹³

In dealing with manuscripts, it is most important to distinguish between plain and illuminated manuscripts. The neglect of this caution has led to an exaggerated idea of the cost of books before the invention of printing. Instances have been given of purchases at sums equal to a king’s ransom. Hence it is supposed that books

¹³ Leader Scott’s “Renaissance of Art in Italy,” 1883, p. 193.

were so dear that they were quite out of the reach of any but the richest personages. But this view is erroneous, for we know that by means of the slave labour at Rome and the organised work in the monasteries, plainly written manuscripts could be obtained at a reasonable price. We know now that transcripts of MSS. can be had at a price which, if dear when compared with the price of a newly-published printed book, is by no means extravagant. What could be done at a centre of civilisation like Rome, where books were produced in large numbers and at low prices on account of the organisation of literary production, could be done at other places. There is evidence that at London, and at those seats of learning, Oxford and Cambridge, where caligraphy was a profession, books were not difficult to obtain. Every church and chapel must have had service-books. Probably during the Middle Ages, when travelling was arduous and expensive, persons living in out-of-the-way places had to pay special prices for their literary treasures.

The late Professor J. Henry Middleton referred to this matter of cost in his valuable work on "Illuminated Manuscripts" (1892). After quoting from Aulus Gellius, he wrote—

"But ordinary copies of newly-published works, even by popular authors, appear to have been but little more expensive than books of this class are at the present day. The publisher and bookseller Tryphon could sell Martial's first book of *Epigrams* at a profit for two denarii—barely two

shillings in modern value (see Mart. xiii. 3). It may seem strange that written manuscripts should not have been much more costly than printed books, but when one considers how they were produced, the reason is evident. Atticus, the Sosii, and other chief publishers of Rome, owned a large number of slaves, who were trained to be neat and rapid scribes. Fifty or a hundred of these slaves could write from the dictation of one reader, and thus a small edition of a new volume of Horace's *Odes* or Martial's *Epigrams* could be produced with great rapidity, and at very small cost" (p. 19).

In the fifteenth century, even, illustrated Books of Hours were produced in France, Flanders, and Holland at a cheap rate. Mr. Middleton wrote—

“Education had gradually been extended among various classes of laymen, and by the middle of the fifteenth century it appears to have been usual not only for all men above the rank of artizans to be able to read, but even women of the wealthy bourgeois class could make use of prayer-books. Hence arose a great demand for pictured *Books of Hours*, which appear to have been produced in enormous quantities by the trade scribes of towns, such as Bruges, Paris, and many others. These common manuscript Hours are monotonous in form and detail; they nearly always have the same set of miniatures, which are coarse in detail and harsh in colour” (p. 141).

Mr. Middleton gives some further information respecting the

cost of production of certain service-books taken from some church records in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—

“From these accounts (1379-1385) we learn that six manuscripts were written, illuminated, and bound, one of them with gold or silver clasps or bosses, at a total cost of £14, 9s. 3d., more than £150 in modern value” (p. 222). “Three Processionals only cost £1, 17s. 4d., being on forty-six quaternions of cheap parchment made of sheepskin, which cost only 2½d. the quaternion” (p. 223).

There was thus great variety of cost in the production of the various kinds of books, but when we consider the matter, we shall find it impossible to do other than believe that a demand for service-books, the price of which was not prohibitive, must have existed.

The Rev. T. Hartwell Horne gave in his “Introduction to Bibliography” some instances of the prices of manuscripts in the Middle Ages, but as some of these were evidently exceptional cases, although they have been used by historians to draw conclusions which we must consider as erroneous, they need not be repeated here.

Dr. S. R. Maitland in his admirable work on the “Dark Ages” comments with much acuteness on some of these cases as quoted by Dr. Robertson, and shows that the historian has drawn a general conclusion from special instances, which in certain cases have not been correctly reported. Maitland adds that some writer a few centuries hence might—

“Tell his gaping readers ... that in the year 1812 one of our nobility gave £2260 and another £1060 for a single volume, and that the next year a Johnson’s Dictionary was sold by public auction to a plebeian purchaser for £200. A few such facts would quite set up some future Robertson, whose readers would never dream that we could get better reading, and plenty of it, much cheaper at that very time. The simple fact is, that there has always been such a thing as bibliomania since there have been books in the world, and no member of the Roxburghe Club has yet equalled the Elector of Bavaria, who gave a town for a single manuscript” (pp. 66-7).

Interesting particulars respecting the composition, binding, and expenses of Petrarch’s library will be found in M. de Nolhac’s monograph on the subject. Petrarch kept copyists in his house, whose shortcomings occasioned him much vexation. He bequeathed his library to Venice, and the Venetians are accused of having suffered it to be dispersed, but it would seem that it never reached them.

We may judge from the immense number of manuscripts still existing, in spite of the wholesale destruction that occurred at various times, how large was the output in the Middle Ages. It is therefore preposterous to suppose that when books were being produced in large numbers in hundreds of monasteries in Europe they were only bought by kings or great nobles.

During the troubled times of the Barons’ Wars there must have been great destruction of literary treasures, and at the

Reformation, when whole libraries were destroyed and made waste-paper of, the ignorant waste was appalling. “The splendid and magnificent abbey of Malmesbury, which possessed some of the finest manuscripts in the kingdom, was ransacked, and its treasures either sold, or burnt to serve the commonest purposes of life. An antiquary who travelled through that town many years after the dissolution, relates that he saw broken windows patched up with remnants of the most valuable MSS. on vellum, and that the bakers hadn’t even then consumed the stores they had accumulated in heating their ovens.”¹⁴ That so much is left after the wholesale raid on the monasteries is largely due to the sound antiquarian taste of John Leland, to whom we of later ages are supremely indebted.

In all times of political convulsions the learning of the world stands a bad chance of escaping great loss, and we are told that twenty-five thousand manuscripts were burnt during the horrors of the French Revolution.

Carelessness and the contempt felt for old books are still the great destructive forces in the East, and the Hon. Robert Curzon, who travelled in search of manuscripts, gives in his “Visits to the Monasteries in the Levant” (1849) a lively account of the irreparable losses that are constantly occurring. (See also Archdeacon Tattam’s and M. Pacho’s narratives of their negotiations with the monks of the Nitrian Desert for Syrian MSS., and the subsequent experiences of Tischendorf and Mrs.

¹⁴ “Letters from the Bodleian,” vol. i. p. 279 (note).

Lewis.) One of the most recent literary events is the recovery of a number of Jewish manuscripts from a *Genizah* or storehouse of old papers and parchments at Cairo, where they were preserved indeed, but entirely neglected.

The late Mr. Thorold Rogers paid considerable attention to the prices of books, and recorded many valuable facts respecting them in his important work, "History of Agriculture and Prices in England." After commenting on some prices in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, he adds, "such prices indicate that written literature was not wholly inaccessible to the general public" (vol. i. p. 646).

The particulars of the cost of church books give perhaps the best idea of prices, because these were needed by a large number of the population. Some of them were of small price, while others of a more elaborate character were of great price. In the year 1278 the bailiff of Farley spent six shillings and eightpence for books for the church, and in 1300 the monks of Ely paid six shillings for a *Decretal*, and two shillings for *Speculum Gregorianum*. In 1329 the precentor received six shillings and sevenpence, with an instruction to go to Balsham to purchase books.¹⁵ In 1344 a Bible cost three pounds, and in 1357 a book was bought for Farley church for four shillings.

Mr. Blades printed in his Life of Caxton an inventory of the library of Jean, Duc de Berri, at the château of Mohun sur Yevre, 1416. At the death of the duke the library contained one hundred

¹⁵ Putnam's "Books and their Makers," 1897, vol. i. p. 159.

and sixty-two volumes, valued at 14,909 livres.

In 1443 twenty-seven volumes were purchased by the authorities of King's Hall, Cambridge, from the executors of John Paston (who had been their steward), at a cost of £8, 17s. 4d. In 1447 the same college bought a Psalter for three shillings and eightpence, and a Donatus for one shilling.

In 1449 twenty new Processionals cost All Souls College one hundred and thirteen shillings and fourpence, and in 1453 a book of Wycliffe's was bought for seven shillings and sixpence, and one written against him for three shillings and sixpence.¹⁶ A manuscript of 157 leaves, containing some of the works of St. Gregory, was bought in 1455 for £3, 6s. 8d.

In 1459 Fastolfe's books were highly priced; thus a fair Mass book was fixed at ten pounds, and a Holy Legend at the same sum, while two new great Antiphons were together £13, 6s. 8d.

One of St. Augustine's Epistles, containing 179 leaves, sold sometime after 1468 for £1, 13s. 4d., and about the same time one of St. Bernard's Treatises, written on 211 leaves, was bought by Richard Hopton from the executors of a former possessor for twenty shillings.

Perhaps a rather more accurate idea of the cost of manuscript books can be obtained from a consideration of the cost of materials and the pay of the scribes, and, fortunately, particulars have come down to us which allow of a comparison of the various expenses.

¹⁶ Rogers's "Agriculture and Prices," vol. iv. pp. 509-604.

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