

The most ancient mention of a trade in books amongst the Greeks is found in Xenophon, who relates that the Thracians inhabiting the shores of the Black Sea, set apart a portion of the coast for the pillage of wrecked vessels. "They found," he says, "upon this shore, great quantity of beds, coffers, books and other movables, which the mariners carry in their chests." And we have the authority of Diogenes Laertius for believing that not only were there booksellers at Athens in the time of Zeno, the Stoic, 300 years before Christ, but that even thus early a species of literary meetings was held. Such, at least, is the inference from a passage in the "Life of Zeno," by the author just cited.

"Zeno, at the age of 30, came to Athens, where he seated himself near the shop of a bookseller, who was reading aloud the second book of 'Xenophon's Commentaries.' Struck with the recital, he enquired where such men could be found. Crates, happening to pass at the moment, the bookseller pointed him out to Zeno, saying, 'you have only to follow him.'" From which time he became a disciple of Crates.

The titles of books, were often printed in large characters, on the fronts of the shops where they were exposed for sale. The third epigram of the first Book of Martial appears to have been intended to be thus exhibited. Its title is:—

"To the Reader, on the place where the Author's Books are sold."
"Thou who desirest to have my books everywhere with thee, and wishest to make them the companions of thy distant journeys, buy those which the parchment holds between two short covers. Leave the thick volumes to libraries. However, that thou may'st know where they are sold, and thou may'st not go running over the whole city, I will serve thee as a guide. Go, find Secundus, the freedman of the learned Lucensis, behind the temple of Peace, and the market of Pallas."

The earliest recognized specimen of printing in the Greek character is the grammar of Constantine Lascaris, printed at Milan in 1476. The volume consists of 72 leaves, of which the first two contain a preface in Greek, with a Latin translation by Demetrius Cretensis, the editor.

The first Greek book printed in France was published at Paris by the celebrated printer Gilles Gourmond, in 1507, and was soon followed by others. It was a quarto, containing the Greek Alphabet, the sayings of the Seven Sages, a short treatise on envy, the golden verses of Pythagoras, the moral poem of Phocylides, the verses of the Erythraean Sybil upon the Last Judgment, and a dissertation upon the difference in voices.

Printing in Greek was introduced in England in 1543; the first specimen was an edition of the "Homilies of St. Chrysostom." Up to the year 1599, the printers in Scotland possessed neither Greek nor Hebrew types; the spaces intended to be occupied by words in either of those languages were left blank in the books, and were filled in afterwards by hand.

Italic types derive their origin from the *cursive* characters employed in the chancery at Rome, and their name from the country in which they were first used. They have sometimes been designated "Venetian letters," because the first punches from which they were struck were made at Venice; and "Aldine" letters from having been invented by Aldus Minutius.

In 1567, types in the Saxon character were cast for the first time in England by J. Daye, for an edition of "The Gospels." The introduction of Chinese types into Europe is due to Kircher, who superintended the casting of them in 1663.

The most ancient specimen of Scottish printing is a volume published at Edinburgh in 1508. A license had been granted by James IV. to Walter Chapman and Andrew Millar, merchants, of that city, to establish a press in 1507. It was some years later before the "noble art" reached Ireland. The first printing in Dublin was in 1531; and in 1631, 100 years later, the first Latin work, by James Usher, was printed in that country.

Two hundred years ago, a Governor of Virginia "thanked God that there was no printing press in his colony; and he hoped that there would be none for 100 years, for learning had brought disobedience, and heresy, and sects into the world, and printing had divulged these and other libels." The sour old royalist had not forgotten the mischief made in England by Pym and Prynne, and the printers who stirred up the people to sedition. And he had high authority for his pet aversion.

But the history of books is as endless as their tendency. Feiltham says that "idle books are the licensed follies of the

age." The comparison was very apt, in Plutarch, "that we ought to regard books as we would sweetmeats; not wholly to aim at the pleasantest, but chiefly to respect the wholesomeness; not forbidding either, but approving the latter most."

In the words of Zimmerman:—

"Reading brings us, in our most leisure hours, to the conversation of men of the most enlightened genius, and presents us with all their discoveries. We enjoy, in the same moment, the company of the learned and the ignorant, of the wise man and the blockhead, and we are taught how to avoid the foibles of the human mind, without having any share in their bad effects."

We may range at will over the whole domain, explore its intricacies, or pass lightly from one sunny spot to another, saying with Pope,—

"Sworn to no master, of no sect am I;
As drives the storm, at any door I knock,
And house with Montaigne now, and now with Locke

A book belongs in a peculiar manner to the age and nation that produce it. It is an emanation of the thought of the time, and if it survive to an aftertime, it remains as a landmark of the progress of the imagination or the intellect. Some books do even more than this; they press forward to the future age, and make appeals to its maturer genius; but in so doing they still belong to their own—they still wear the garb which stamps them as appertaining to a particular epoch. Of that epoch, it is true, they are, intellectually, the flower and chief; they are the expression of its finer spirit, and serve as a link between the two generations, of the past and the future; but of that future—so much changed in habits and feelings, and knowledge—they can never, even when acting as guides and teachers, form an essential part: there is a bond of sympathy wanting.

A glance at our great books will illustrate this—books which are constantly reprinted, without which no library can be tolerated—which are still, generation after generation, the objects of the national worship, and are popularly supposed to afford a universal and unfailing standard of excellence in the various departments of literature. These books, though pored over as a task and a study by the few, are rarely opened and seldom read by the many, they are known at least by those who reverence them most. They are in short, idols, and their worship is not a faith, but a superstition. This kind of belief is not shaken even by experience. When a devourer of the novels of Sir Walter Scott, for instance, takes up *Tom Jones*, he, after a vain attempt to read, may lay it down with a feeling of surprise and dissatisfaction; but *Tom Jones* remains still to his convictions "an epic in prose," the fiction par excellence of the language. As for *Clarissa Harlowe* and *Sir Charles Grandison*, we have not heard of any common reader in our generation who has had the hardihood even to open the volumes; but *Richardson* as well as *Fieldding* retains his original niche among the gods of romance; and we find *Scott* himself one of the high priests of this worship. One of our literary idols is *Shakespeare*—perhaps the greatest of them all; but although the most universal of poets, his works in the mass belong to the age of Elizabeth, not to ours. It has been said, if *Shakespeare* were now living he would manifest the same dramatic power, but under different forms; and his taste, his knowledge, and his beliefs would all be different. This, however, is not the opinion of the book-worshippers; it is not the poetry alone of *Shakespeare*, but the work bodily, which is pre-eminent with them; not that which is universal in his genius, but that which likewise is restricted by the fetters of time and country. It would be easy to run over, in this way, the list of our great authors, and to show that book-worship as contradistinguished from a wise and discriminating respect, is nothing more than a vulgar superstition.

When we talk of the authors of our generation pressing forward to claim the sympathy of the maturer genius of the next, we mean precisely what we say. We are well aware that some of the great writers we have mentioned have no equals in the present world; yet the present world is more mature in point of taste than their own. That is the reason why they are great authors now. Some books last for a season, some for a generation, some for an age, or two, or more; always dropping off when the time they reach outstrips them. One of these lost