

MR. GLADSTONE ON BOOK COLLECTING.

THE following letter has just been made public in The London Academy :

"Hawarden, September 9, 1896.

"Dear Mr. Quaritch—The regiment of book collectors stands in no need of recruits, and even if its ranks were thin I doubt if I am qualified to enlist. I have in my time been a purchaser to the extent of about 35,000 volumes, and I might therefore abide a quantitative test, but, as I fear, no other. A book collector, as I conceive, ought to possess the following six qualifications—appetite, leisure, wealth, knowledge, discrimination, and perseverance. Of these I have only had two, the first and the last, and these are not the most important. Restricted visual power now imposes upon me a serious amount of disability, and, speaking generally, I have retired from the list of purchasers. I am gradually transferring the bulk of my library to the institution of St. Deiniol's at this place which I hope to succeed in founding, but I retain certain branches for use and a few of what are to me treasures, though you would. I apprehend, refuse to most of them a place on your shelves.

"The oldest book I have—that is to say, the one longest in my possession—was presented to me personally by Mrs. Hannah More. It is a copy of her 'Sacred Dramas,' printed and given to me in 1815, 81 years ago, and was accompanied with a pretty introductory sentence, of which I remember only the first words. They were these. 'As you have just come into this world, and I am just going out of it, allow me'—and so forth. My purchases commenced a few years after that time, and I have a variety of books acquired at Eton. Among them is a copy of Mr. Hallam's 'Constitutional History,' in quarto, presented to me by his son, Arthur, the subject of 'In Memoriam,' and at that period my dearest friend.

"Book buyers of the present day have immense advantages in the extended accessibility and cheapness of books, which, whether in the ancient or modern languages, ought to be considered classical. I have a copy of 'The Spectator,' in eight volumes, octavo, which cost me £4, and I hold Scott's poems in the small volumes at a somewhat larger price. These were both bought in the 20's. The enormous development of the second-hand book trade, and the public spirit of many publishers, have also been greatly in favor of book buyers.

"In one respect only they have lost ground, and that is in regard to bookbinding. It is (as a general rule—I am not complaining in my case) much dearer than it was 70 or 80 years back, and notwithstanding abolitions of duty and enlarged

use of machinery, it is generally worse in that vitally important particular, the easy opening of a book. Our case contrasts very favorably with cases such as those of France and Italy. (Yet, as I know, good plain binding can still be had at reasonable prices.) I showed lately to a friend my copy of the original octavo edition of Scott's earlier novels (down to 'Quentin Durward') in half morocco, with gilt tops. He priced the binding for to-day at 4s.—I think rather too high—but, when at Oxford, the binder charged me two. As quantity has been my strongest point, I may without offence refer to it in comparison with quality. An able and learned person of our day bought for his own use 20,000 volumes. They were examined and valued for sale (which never came off) in London, and it was predicted that he would get for them £8,000 (query £2,000?), or a little over 2s. a volume. Nearly at the same time a library of somewhat over half the quantity, but rich in rarities, brought (not at auction) about £6 a volume.

"Though, as I have said, a beggarly collector, I have had a few specialties. One I will mention. I accumulated more than 30 distinct rifaccimenti of the 'Book of Common Prayer.' Many of these had prefaces which commonly ran to this effect: 'The Prayer Book is excellent, but it has some blemishes; let them be removed, and

it will find universal acceptance. Accordingly I have performed this operation and I now give the restored Prayer Book to the world.' But I have never obtained, and have never seen, a second edition of any one of these productions. I greatly doubt whether they have usually paid the printer's bills.

"Book-collecting may have its quirks and eccentricities, but, on the whole, it is a vitalising element in a society honeycombed by several sources of corruption. My apology for the poor part I have played in it is that it could only have the odds and ends—the dregs and leavings—of my time, and accordingly I am aware that the report which I send you is a very meagre one. To mend it a little, I give to this pursuit in all its walks, from the highest (with which you are of all men the most conversant) downwards, my heartiest good wishes, and that I may not be ungrateful, I will apprise you that I still preserve among my most select possessions the beautiful copy on vellum of the Lyttleton-Gladstone translation which you were so good as to present to me.

"I remain, very faithfully yours,

"W. E. GLADSTONE.

"B. Quaritch, Esq."

Samuel Fleuty, stationery, Palmerston, Ont., is dead.

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