

gives pleasure to these explorations, and that is that the explorer is never looked upon as an intruder or a nuisance if he does not buy. You may walk into a book-shop here and without a word to any one, proceed to look through the books for hours and then walk out without having bought a single volume, and without a comment by look or word from the shopkeeper. You are not pestered to buy this or that work, or peppered with questions as to what you want. The shopkeeper anticipates that his visitors know what they are after, and that if they find what they want they will let him know. Thus the bookworm feels at home in these haunts, and the bookseller loses nothing by letting him have free scope.

I have in my mind a haunt in Manchester that is typical of ye olde Englishe second-hand book shop. You go down an irregular flight of stone steps—for whoever saw a flight of steps in England that was anything else but irregular?—and find yourself in a dark and dismal basement with queer recesses and tiny cloisters, where on any but the very brightest days you could no more make out the title of a book than you could see the canals of Mars with the naked eye. And yet of a night, when all is murky and dreary on the street, you would feel it worth paying a shilling admission to be here foraging among these brightly lit cloisters, or seated on the stools provided at every one of the odd old book racks that fill up every part of the main chamber; a flickering grate fire in one corner, with a heavy English mantle over it, and rows of books on and over that, imparting a home-like air to the whole place.

Such curious old characters resort here to buy books or kill time! After becoming a habitue of this literary lion's den myself, I got to know many of these customers and their peculiarities. Here is one old gentleman, dressed in a rather shabby frock coat and a silk hat of ancient date, and wearing a nose that covered at least two-thirds of the apparent area of his features. He was a retired merchant of unknown wealth, and his hobby was the collection of prints. He never

went outside of steel engravings or lithographs, and none of the curious old books to be found here had the slightest temptation for him. He was good pay, and never beat the shopkeeper down; as there was little need to, indeed, for the prices were always low. The benevolent-looking old proprietor rarely asked more than a shilling for any book he sold, and rarely gave more than threepence for any he bought. His den was an out-of-the-way place in an out-of-the-way street, with a low rent, and he made his living by buying and selling cheap. He turned over his books in much the same way as a grocer shovels out his tea and sugar. Like most of his class, he never pressed a man to buy, and seldom took any trouble to hunt for the kind of book a customer asked for. If one came in and said, "Have you anything on Australia?" his answer would be, "There may be, sir—just look." And if the customer did not choose to investigate, he could go out. In truth, so many books came in and went out in a day that he could not have kept the "run" of them if he had tried.

But here comes another of his queer visitors—you could not call him a customer, for he was never known to buy a book. He was well dressed, gentlemanly in bearing—in short, just the man to build a shopkeeper up with the idea that he was going to buy a cart-load without the least haggling as to price—if he got what he wanted—but he never did. He would walk in, handle over books for an hour or two, and walk out again with the remark that he hadn't time to look through, but would call again; but whether he made the remark to himself, or to them, or threw it off as a general observation—like Grip, the raven, when he sat on the tombstone in the parish church at Chigwell, observing that he was a devil—no one could make out. He came in regularly and often, but was never known to buy a book. The shopkeeper has got so used to it, that if he should ever buy a book he would regard it as a sign of an early death or some other calamity to the customer or himself.