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BOOKS AND LIBRARIES.

A LECTURE BY SIR JOHN SIMEON, BART., M.A.

I have chosen the subject of Books and Libraries, as one peculiarly calculated to make the foundation and ground-work of a course of lectures, inasmuch as Books and the repositories in which they have at different times been stored, may be said to be the very tools and workshops of those who are engaged in the Literary and Scientific pursuits which this and other institutions of a similar kind are meant to foster and encourage. A lecture on this subject may, therefore, be considered as intended to give the workman a general notion of the tools which he has to use.

Another motive, too, impelled me to this selection. Books, not merely for their literary use and for the sake of their contents, but on their own account, have been for many years a subject of absorbing interest to me. In fact, I may say, from my own experience, with our great philosophic poet, Wordsworth—

"Dreams, books, are each a world, and books we know
Are a substantial world both pure and good,
Round them with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,
Our pastime and our happiness will grow."

I am well aware that the pursuit which has been called the Bibliomania may be carried to a most unjustifiable excess. It is recorded that Plato, the greatest of Heathen philosophers, bought three books at the price of 10,000 Denarii (about 300*l.* of our money), and that his scarcely less illustrious pupil, Aristotle, bought a few books of Spensippus, the philosopher, for the still larger sum of three Attic Talents (nearly 600*l.*) Plato had but a very small inheritance, which in the spirit of a philosopher he had not sought to increase, and he was accordingly scoffed at by an obscure satirist of his time, for the absurdly high price which he had given; but we also learn that from one of those books he

drew the idea of his noble dialogue of the *Timæus*. Here, in perhaps one of the earliest instances, we have a triumphant vindication of the Bibliomania.

The passion for mere book-collecting is severely handled by the great satirist, Lucian. He compares the illiterate possessor of learned books to a lame man who tries to conceal the deformity of his feet by wearing embroidered shoes, to Thersites tottering under the armour of Achilles, and blinded by his helmet. "Why," says he, "do you buy so many books? You are blind, and you buy a grand mirror—you are deaf, and you purchase fine musical instruments—you have no hair, and you get yourself a comb."

In the singular poem of the *Ship of Fools*, by Sebastian Brandt, printed at the end of the fifteenth century, and translated into English within one hundred years of that time, the first place in the catalogue of fools who form the crew of this singular vessel, is given to the poor book collector, who is represented in the quaint woodcut with spectacles on nose and dusting brush in hand, bending over the cherished treasures of which he admits he knows but the outsides. It may amuse my audience to hear the language, having still, as I admit, its appropriate bearing on some cases, which old Alexander Barclay puts into the mouth of this mere book fancier of three hundred years ago.

And first as to the origin and history of books. From the earliest times and amongst all nations we find a desire existing for the preservation of their memorials, and for their transmission to posterity in an imperishable form.

We are told of the same propensity among savage tribes and nations in our own time, and I find among my memoranda a notice of a sort of hereditary Bibliographer attached to the court of the King of the Sandwich Islands, to whom was entrusted the duty of preserving the records of the dynasty. We find that from the earliest ages, and long before the discovery of the art of writing properly so called, picture writing, hieroglyphics, and symbolic characters were resorted to with this object.

Not only throughout the East, as in Egypt, Assyria, and Persia, do we find the history of the country written in this manner upon obelisks, pyramids, columns, and the vast facades of temples, but in South America, among the aboriginal inhabitants the same system of picture writing was resorted to, as may be seen by a reference to Lord Kingsborough's splendid work on Mexican Antiquities. In the furthest North too, we are told that the Icelanders used to scratch their runes* in hieroglyphics on the walls; and

* The Scandinavian characters were called Runes, and the term is also applied to the incantations which were used among the Nations of the North.