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# BOOKS AND BOOKSELLERS

IN ANCIENT AND  
MODERN TIMES

WITH AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL EXPERIENCES OF THE PAST  
SIXTY YEARS

A LECTURE DELIVERED BY

JOHN BRITNELL

IN THE ART GALLERIES, 230 YONGE STREET, TORONTO



TORONTO:  
JOHN BRITNELL, LIMITED.  
1908.



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*To the memory of the many beloved  
friends and correspondents, now no  
longer with us, and to those who remain,  
I dedicate these few notes from my  
eventful life with affection and gratitude.*

## INTRODUCTION

Ladies and Gentlemen, lovers of books and pictures, fellow travellers on the highways and byways of one of the most delightful occupations which have or can occupy the enlightened and enquiring mind. Occupying the pleasant yet difficult position I am called upon to do on this occasion, I am reminded of a little scene which took place in London some seventy years ago. The Duke of Wellington having appointed Canon Melville, one of the most eloquent preachers of the time, to the chaplaincy of the Tower of London, the Canon said to the Duke, "I have never preached to soldiers. Will your Grace give me any hints?" The Duke replied, "Be brief, Mr. Melville, and to the purpose." This excellent advice will be followed by your humble servant, especially as I am confronted by so many eminent men who have scaled the heights of literature far in advance of myself.

The lasting pleasure and advantages resulting from the love and systematic reading of the best books cannot fail to bring us into companionship with enlightened and good men, and the establishment of reading rooms and libraries in recent years has tended towards the cultivation of the mind and the uplifting of the moral standard of the people. On the other hand light and frothy reading proves a ready introduction to licentious

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books leading to wasted lives. All books and publications of this kind, which are printed and circulated by the million for mercenary purposes, without any regard for character, morals or religion, should be banished from the home and excluded from public reading rooms and libraries. Young people should be protected to-day—to-morrow they will become heads of families and leaders in society. We emphasize the fact that good books are like corner-stones in a magnificent building. A home or a people without good books is something more than waste; in short, an empty brain is the devil's workshop.

*John Buttwell*



## Books and Booksellers in Ancient and Modern Times



WRITERS, Publishers and Booksellers have not always been so closely related as they have been in modern times. The Literature of the Chaldeans was perhaps the earliest yet discovered and translated of any ancient people. Sir Henry Layard first discovered some clay bricks or tablets covered with cuneiform characters drawn or scratched in lines by the stylus while the clay was in a soft plastic condition, after which they being subjected to heat became durable for all time. Thousands of these early books have come from the Royal Library of the Palaces of Sennacherib, dating B.C. 650, and other excavations and discoveries by Mr. George Smith who was employed as an engraver in the British Museum. Smith journeyed on three occasions to Mesopotamia and by long patient labor and study succeeded in procuring numerous broken tablets and bringing many hundreds together into their proper relationship and by piecing the broken portions according to subjects, in much the same way as we should arrange our own library. There are tens of thousands of these tablets or books brought to light relating to government, agriculture, instructions in praying to the gods, records of various campaigns and even little children's books.

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The writers or stylus drivers were oftentimes public officials, at other times slaves being employed. Sometimes as many as three, oftentimes two and more often only one copy of each of the books were produced, and these for the royal residences, and may be described as limited and authentic editions of the public records. Many of them contain condensed accounts of traditions and transactions occurring some four or five thousand years previously. In 1872 Mr. Smith found among the tablets several which contained some ancient Assyrian legends. Some of the legends thus brought to light contained no doubt copies of other documents which had been composed in Babylonia or Chaldea. One of these contain the story of the Flood. There were three copies discovered, but all imperfect. Berosus, who wrote three hundred years B.C., no doubt copied and condensed this account of the deluge and incorporated the same in his work.

It is contended by some archeologists the civilization and literature of Egypt took its rise and was developed very much earlier than any other portion of the world. Only portions of forty-two works taking the form of a national encyclopaedia ascribed to Thoth or Trismegistus were in existence at the commencement of the historical period. In 1892, other papyri were discovered containing notes or commentaries upon these Hermetic books, these being the work of scribes of the fourth dynasty, 3733-3566 B.C., that being the date of the building of the great pyramid by Chufu or Cheops.

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The Book of the Dead, or the book revealing the light, is said to have been written in part by Thoth and other portions to be the composition of a great God. Copies were prepared for particular funerals and were more or less elaborate and comprehensive according to the position and wealth of the departed and his or her mourners, being written on papyri and preserved in tinted sheepskin covers, a copy of the book being always placed in the tomb as a safe conduct for the soul through Hades and as a guide in the future world. The Book of the Dead is distinguished as being the first literature of the regular sale of which we have any evidence. The Egyptian undertaker, no doubt by permission of the priests, conducted the business of distributing authenticated copies of those sacred events, oftentimes containing memoirs of the deceased. Thus the Egyptian undertakers, most likely under the tuition and direction of the priests and with the assistance of the scribes and students attached to the temples, may be described as the first booksellers of which we have any record. The most complete copy of the Book of the Dead, taking rank as one of the oldest works of literature in the world, is in the British Museum; a small edition has been printed under the editorship of Mr. Wallace Budge of the Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities in the British Museum.

The very earliest booksellers in Greece and Rome, who by their own hands prepared the leaves of parchment

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and scrolls of papyri, were the scribes. This was their business, and constituted their stock in trade. Booksellers made their appearance in Athens about 450 B.C. After this date the business of the bookseller is frequently mentioned. Aristomenes, a naval commander, who died 671 B.C., in his comedy of the "Deceivers," speaks of a dealer in books, and Theopompus, writing about 330 B.C., uses the term bookseller. Cratinus, the comic writer, in his play "The Mechanics," written about 450 B.C., speaks of a copyist, Bibliographus. Nicophon, the Athenian, comic poet B.C. 400, gives a list of men who supported themselves with the labor of their hands, and in this list groups in the bibliopoles with dealers of fish, fruit, figs, leather, meal and household goods. There are hundreds of references in ancient writings and the classics more or less illustrating this interesting subject, and the farther we come down the stream of history, the relationship of the scribes and the copyist, the author and the bookseller or publisher, becomes more and more fascinating. The rivalry which existed between the Ptolemies and the Attali in the collecting of libraries caused the price of books in Athens to remain high, 250 B.C. The literary activity of the Alexandrian scholars caused that city to become one of the great book marts of the world. It is curious that Alexandria derived little or no inspiration from the literature of ancient Egypt. The learning of the Nile had no part in founding the schools and the wonderful library of that great centre. In conception and construction it was

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almost purely Greek. Schools of instruction existed and courses of lectures had been delivered and a public library had been founded at Athens, 300 B.C.

The museum of Alexandria was of Greek origin and character. Callimachus, an Alexandrian writer, states the outer library contained 42,000 rolls, while the inner contained 49,000 rolls. Josephus, quoting Demetrius Phalereus, mentions 200,000 volumes and would soon include 500,000. Zeno, the founder of the Stoics, who suffered shipwreck near the Pirius and who opened a school at Athens, Diogenes informs us, was strolling sadly down the market-place in a poverty-stricken condition when he passed a bookseller's shop, and hearing the bookseller reading aloud he stopped to listen, and there came to him words of good counsel from the memoirs of Zenophon. "Cultivate a cheerful endurance of trouble and an earnest striving after knowledge, for these are the conditions of a useful and happy life." Zeno entered the bookseller's shop and enquired where he should find the teachers from whom he could learn such wise philosophy. In reply, this well-informed bookseller as to the literary life of the city, pointed out the cynic Krates, who was passing at the moment. We regret that Diogenes does not give us more information respecting this Athenian bookseller who carried on a successful business in the third century B.C. The Alexandrian library was begun about 298 B.C. We know there were many publishing firms in Rome at the time of the Empire. There existed public places where

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writers and poets could be sure of an audience, at which Roman citizens of eminence, and even Emperors, presided. Authors of reputation oftentimes read aloud their productions on these occasions. Newspapers existed, the subject matter of which was very much like our own. The leading journal, *Acta Duirna*, was compiled under the sanction of the government, and was hung up in a place of public resort for the convenience of the people, and copies were made for the more wealthy citizens. All public events of importance were recorded. The *actuarii*, or reporters as we should call them, furnished abstracts or short accounts of the law-courts and public meetings. It also contained lists of births, marriages and deaths. It was also celebrated for its reports of trials for divorce. Juvenal, the Latin Satiric poet, informs us the women were all agog for news of deluge, earthquakes and other disasters, and that the wise merchants and traders used to insert false news in order to affect their various markets. It was an age of literature, and libraries were general. Nearly every respectable house possessed a number of books. Slave readers and slave transcribers were almost as indispensable as cooks, and other servant slaves were employed in making copies of books for their masters. Titus Pomponius Atticus, a celebrated Roman Knight, a man of letters and a scholar himself, was beloved by his contemporaries. His connection with Cicero and Cicero's letters to Atticus contained the general history of the age. Cicero used Atticus as counsellor, critic,

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and publisher. He was a thorough scholar and his earliest labors were editions of the Greek classics. He possessed a wonderful collection of manuscripts and employed a number of scribes to copy from dictation simultaneously, and was thus able to multiply books as fast as demanded. His success speedily followed and publishing became a recognized trade. Atticus died, full of fame and honors, in the year 32 B.C. Martial, Ovid and Propertius speak of their works as being known all the world over, that young and old, women and girls, in Rome and in the Provinces of Britain and in Gaul, read their verses. "Every one," says Martial, "has me in his pocket, every one has me in his hands." School-books were also published and in demand at Rome according to Martial. The first book of his Epigrams was to be bought, neatly bound, for five *denarii* (about seventy cents) and in a cheaper binding at a much lower rate. In Rome, therefore, we see that from the employment of slave labor, and some thousands of slaves were engaged in this work of transcribing books at and around the commencement of our era, books were both plentiful and cheap.

Bookselling in Rome had become a recognized trade at this time. Alexandria was despatching shiploads of papyrus from those occupied in preparing the pith and cutting into strips and pressing this graceful plant, which constituted the paper of the ancients, and large shipments of books were regularly made to Lyons and other cities. The word paper is, of course, descended

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from its parent, papyrus. Centuries previous to the use of the Egyptian plant, skins, thinly rolled sheets of lead, strips of linen and wax tablets were used for records, as well as for correspondence. Wax tablets were known to Homer and were used among the Romans more than a thousand years later. Slabs of wood and the bark of trees were also used. The papyrus book was much like a modern map, written on one side only, and wound around a wooden roller, the rolls being often twenty to forty yards long. Herodotus mentions the fact of the whole of the *Odyssey* being written on one such roll. The confiscation of books was sometimes resorted to and for various reasons. In 411 B.C. the writings of Protagoras were burned and the philosopher himself was placed on trial for heresy. The power for the suppression of what was supposed to be erroneous doctrines and the confiscation and destruction of books was vested in the uncertain authorities at Athens. Augustus gave an order for the burning of about 2,000 copies of certain pseudo-sibylline books and a thorough search was to be made in all the book shops and for existing copies in private collections. Caligula, according to Suetonius, undertook to suppress the writings of Homer and gave orders, which were only partly carried out, that all the busts and writings of Virgil and Livy present in the libraries should be destroyed. Tiberius ordered that all writings of a certain historian of the time of Augustus should be abolished from all the public libraries. Domitian put an end to the history of Hermo-



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genes of Tarsus by crucifying the publisher. A house-to-house search where collections of books were known to exist was often made for forbidden works. Diocletian collected and destroyed all the ancient manuscripts of Egypt he could discover which treated on or had to do with the chemistry of quicksilver and gold. The edict of Diocletian, issued 300 A.D., directing a persecution of the Christians, also commanded the destruction of the Christian Scriptures, when numbers of the converts to the Christian Church acknowledged they had in their possession copies of the Scriptures and refused to give them up, and suffered martyrdom in consequence. The subject pertaining to the wholesale destruction of manuscripts and books relating to religion, philosophy and science from early antiquity down to our own times is a most interesting one, and could not perhaps be adequately treated of in a volume of one thousand pages, but there can be no question of the duty of any magistrate or government in making strenuous laws for the protecting of the people against immoral and pernicious literature, and in this connection I may perhaps be permitted to say that no book of a questionable character, no pernicious literature of any description has ever been seen or discovered either in my shop or on my shelves, nor has my catalogue ever been disgraced or contaminated with obnoxious or obscene literature of any kind. Nothing has been offered for sale that I could not read aloud in my own family circle.

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The capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 after a siege of fifty-three days, and the destruction of thousands of valuable manuscripts was one of the results of the introduction of the Turks into Europe. But numerous students and scholars made their escape from the cruel conquerors and succeeded in saving many manuscripts, which were brought to Italy and Germany and became invaluable to European students, but some of these treasures have only the last few years, after being buried and forgotten so long, been rediscovered. The dispersion of scholars and parchments and the desire for knowledge no doubt stimulated the production of block books and movable types, the leaves of which being printed on one side only, were afterwards pasted together. It was John Gutenberg who produced the Mazarin Bible, so called from the discovery of a copy in the Cardinal's library at Mentz. This was printed 1450-55, forty-two lines to a full page, and is in two volumes folio, a copy of which was printed on vellum and sold at the Perkins sale to Lord Ashburnham for £3,400. William Caxton followed in 1474, with the "Game and Playe of the Chesse;" and Aldus cut the first Greek alphabet in 1476.

In England during the middle ages there was little or no trade in books, but gradually a system of trading or barter between the monks of numerous monasteries was practised, and on the foundation of the universities a regular class of copyists came into existence to supply the requirements of scholars and professors. This sys-

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tem, due to the invention of paper made from cotton rags, became general in England about 1300. Paper mills, according to Stow, were erected in England in 1580. The booksellers of this and a somewhat earlier period were known as stationarii, from the practice of having stalls or stands in the streets. Pedlars were often under university control, the pedlars and stationers being very often their own engrossers. The literature consisted mostly of A.B.C.'s, Paternosters, or the Lord's Prayer, Creeds, Graces, and Amens; Paternoster Row, Amen Corner and Ave Marie Lane in the City of London being celebrated the world over, and carry in their names their origin and trade. There were 350 printers and booksellers in England and Scotland between 1474-1600, and the names are given in Ames & Herbert's "Typographical Antiquities."

One of the most interesting items in the history of English or American printing or bookselling is the sale catalogue of William Cooper, bookseller, of the Pelican in Little Britain, who held the first sale ever advertised in England, it being the library of Dr. Lazarus Seaman. At this sale was a book which sold for less than almost any other. It lay hidden away under this bald and misleading description: "Veteris et Novi Testamenti in Ling. Indica. Cantabe in Nova Anglia." Simply this and nothing more. No date, condition, or binding appears in Cooper's catalogue, and yet this Bible is none other than John Eliot's translation into the Indian language, with a metrical version of the Psalms in the

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same vernacular, published at Cambridge, Mass, in 1663. A copy of this volume was sold in London, June 29th, 1888, for £580. We may mention one other interesting item in English literature, that being the first catalogue of books in England, which was issued in Shakespear's time by a bookseller named Andrew Maunsell, who commenced business about 1570, at the Parrot, St. Paul's Churchyard. Bibliographically speaking it is of great value. The title runs as follows: "The first part of the Catalogue of English printed books which concerneth such matters of Divinitie as have been either written in our owne tongue or translated out of anie other language which have been published to the Glory of God and Edification of the Church of Christ in England, gathered into alphabet and such method as it is by Andrew Maunsell, bookseller, printed by John Windet for Andrew Maunsell, dwelling in Lothburie, 1595." From thence bookselling and publishing became a progressive and interesting business. The origin and history of the newspapers, journals and magazines is of great and lasting interest—the *London Magazine*, the *Grub Street Journal*, *Daily Current*, *Monthly Register*, *The Englishman's Evening Post*, *The Gentleman's Magazine*. It is said that it was Tom Rawlinson, the Tom folio of No. 158 of *The Tatler*, who stuffed his chambers in Grey's Inn so full of books that his bed was removed out into the passage. Poor Tom reminds me of a customer who frequently visited my own shop in Euston Road, over forty years ago. He was a lawyer and a good

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classical scholar, and his purchases consisted largely of the folio editions of the classics, the Greek and the Latin fathers of the Church, and controversial divinity. His periodical visits to my establishment were finally discontinued; I became anxious and on making enquiries as to my missing friend I learned to my astonishment that he had passed on to his last home, having completely filled up four moderately sized houses with books. It is more than forty years since Mr. Gladstone, on the occasion of one of his visits to my shop, informed me he had several rooms occupied by his books. It was subsequent to this that he had a special building erected in the park for their reception. The subject connected with authors and booksellers during the 17th and 18th centuries is of the greatest interest, and whether considered from historical, political, controversial, or theological standpoints, we become amazed at the literary activity displayed by scores of pamphleteers and writers on miscellaneous and all kinds of subjects. Political caricatures and broadsides by Edmund Curll, whose quarrel with Pope was protracted for years. Curll lost his ears for printing the "Nun in her Smock." Thomas Avery in "The Life of John Bunce" published in 1756, says Curll was very tall and thin and ungainly—an awkward, white-faced man, his eyes light grey, large, projecting goggle and purblind. He was square-footed, foolish and baker kneed. Amory, in one of his letters to Swift, dated March 18th, 1736, says that Curll, like his friend the Devil, glides through all key-holes

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and shunts himself into the most private cabinets. Curll died December 11th, 1747. We may perhaps just say that we have at various times purchased and distributed thousands of pamphlets, broadsides and caricatures printed by Curll, and many other controversialists and writers, some well-known and others unknown, mostly illustrative of the 17th and 18th centuries.

There is a memorable scene in Boswell's "Life of Samuel Johnson," in which the following passage occurs: "Seven years, my Lord, have now passed since I waited in your outward rooms or was repulsed from your door." This letter was addressed to Lord Chesterfield and should be read together with the circumstances. Johnson was a young man struggling for his bread and character and a kind word containing advice at such a time would have been appreciated, but Lord Chesterfield lost his opportunity. Twenty-four years ago a copy of the sale catalogue of Dr. Johnson's library was found in the neighborhood of Fleet Street, with the prices of each book neatly marked. This literary treasure was afterwards sold for the sum of two pounds. What great satisfaction, unspeakable joy, must the purchaser have had as he read the titles of the books which the Doctor himself had consulted, or read, in the course of writing the "Lives of the Poets," "The Vanity of Human Wishes," or his wonderful dictionary.

It is sixty years since a lad between twelve and thirteen years of age, and recently from the little cottage

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home in the country, where provisions were high priced and employment scarce, stood with only a few pence in his pocket and his little bundle containing two or three articles of clothing, with his Bible—the whole of his worldly possessions. This lonely traveller was standing at one of the corners of one of the streets leading out of Marylebone. He had been searching the shop windows for hours for any sign or card containing information that a boy was wanted, when suddenly he was accosted by a lad, a year or two older than himself, and from his native village, who had a good home with relatives and was thus in very superior circumstances. The boy took it for granted that he had found a friend and his drooping spirits revived as he told the story of his pitiful position. Scarcely had he finished his narrative when the other lad turned on his heel and was lost to sight, and I was alone in London, without a friend in the world. But within a few hours I succeeded in finding employment at six shillings per week and a small corner which served as a bed. Many times have I since stood on that, to me historic spot; and hundreds of times have I contrasted the scene on the steps at the front door of Lord Chesterfield's mansion, with that of the poor lad in Marylebone Lane, who never imagined that in after years and within a short distance of that locality he would become proprietor of one of the most renowned and respectable second-hand bookshops in London. I recall the purchase of a copy of the works of Josephus and other books, at the expense of my dinner for many

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successive days. My reading for profit as well as for pleasure brought me into the society of persons in much better circumstances than myself and paved the way for friendships formed in the British Museum, and I well remember my first introduction to the magnificent Reading Room more than fifty years ago. Winter Jones, Dr. Birch, and George Bullen, who gave me some lessons as to the use of the catalogue, and my associations with other friends, long deceased, and the kindness I experienced, will never be effaced from my memory—I have my Reader's Ticket to-day. Years previously, when boarding at St. John's Wood with a hard-working widow with a large family who had seen better days, I had the use of the remnants of a useful library in the home, including a Greek grammar, a French grammar, the Rev. John Newton's works, and other interesting and useful books. The Greek and French grammars were turned to good use by myself, but one of the boys who saw the progress I was making, deprived me of the books and I never saw them after. That is nearly sixty years ago, and I remember and have cause to remember the incident perfectly. It was my privilege to visit this poor woman, my benefactor, with a little cheer when near the end of her pilgrimage.

Students in needy circumstances were frequent visitors at my shop. Some have become authors and well-known in modern literature; others have become legislators and divines. These friends and purchasers have followed me from time to time with letters, re-



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minding me of little acts of kindness in aiding and encouraging them in times of distress, long since forgotten by myself, illustrating the truth that bread cast upon the waters shall be seen after many days. For some years I derived great pleasure through being enabled to render continuous sympathy and aid to worthy and aged relatives in this connection. I may just state that when ten years of age, and after a long illness during which my only sister died, I being restored to health, when I was employed as an errand boy and boy of all work at Sandgate, in Kent, the first half-sovereign I possessed up to that time was sent at Christmas time to my poor and needy parents in Oxfordshire, and I might state further I have never said a kind word or done a kind deed but it has been returned to me in peace of mind, kind friends and prosperity a hundredfold. Like most business men I have experienced losses and have had crosses; in one transaction alone in early days in London I was at a loss in the end of more than four hundred pounds. It was a trial of faith in trying to do good to others, and I never regretted it, and I believe this so-called loss has been a blessing from the first. It will be fifty years on the 18th of October since I became a bookseller, with the magnificent stock of about fifty volumes, of historical and controversial subjects, on a little side street off the Euston Road, the rent being twelve shillings per week. The shutters were down and the shop opened soon after seven in the morning and scarcely ever closed before ten at night, but stock accu-

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mulated and customers were good, and I have the original accounts from the first day the shop was open for business. I soon purchased a long lease of more commodious premises in the Euston Road. The shop soon became known far and wide for early and rare editions of the Greek and Latin classics, the early Christian fathers, scholastic and controversial divinity, French and European authors generally.

I received a pressing invitation many years ago in London to purchase the library of a collector, and I discovered the poor fellow quite sick, and hanging by means of a length of old carpet and ropes attached to the corners and fastened to the rafters in the ceiling, forming a kind of hammock, there being no other space available for his bed, the place being completely filled with books—books on the floor, beneath the chairs and on the chairs, beneath the tables and on the tables, cupboards full and piled up along the walls. To visitors and others it was a perfect maze, and to some extent dangerous. Yet the worm himself, sick as he was, could direct you to any volume in any point in his extraordinary surroundings. It is a sad and sorrowful truth, that this man who had burrowed and ransacked in out-of-the-way corners of unknown places, and haggled and worried over prices the greater part of his life—surrounded by the joys and sorrows of himself and a thousand others—it is indeed painful to think that he should have died like other men.

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In old times at the shop in Euston Road upwards of one hundred fine specimens of fifteenth century printed books could have been seen at one time. On one occasion, a well-to-do Frenchman, whose name I knew not, paid me a hurried visit and purchased and paid for at the full price all the fifteenth century and other early printed books he could find, and collecting them together without a word of explanation, extracted all titles, colophons, preliminary initial letters and illuminated capitals from about fifty, mostly mixed folios of large size, some of which were bound in oak, others in vellum, others in hogskin with beautiful emblematic designs, and having clasps, the imperfect, mutilated books being left on the floor of the shop. This was the greatest exhibition of unforgivable vandalism I have ever witnessed. On one occasion we had in our possession a fine folio specimen of a Chained Bible; the Vinegar Bible and Breches Bible, now becoming scarce, were then often on hand. Among other rare and precious items in our possession for some years was a small folio sheet of vellum containing an original poem by Torquato Tasso, the Italian poet, in his own autograph and signed by himself.

Another interesting and valuable manuscript which passed through my hands included a journal kept by the Governor of Norfolk Island. This comprised the history of the removal or migration of many of the residents of Pitcairn Island nearly seventy years ago, and covered a period of several years.

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Very many of the visitors to my shop in those days were not regarded so much as customers as friends, and I considered it a privilege and a duty to bring the author and those for whom he wrote together. Thus when Dr. Joseph Angus called in it was some rare old volumes of early Nonconformist divines, as well as scholastic and classical authors. Was it Professor Stanley Jevons, I could introduce all kinds of out-of-the-way pamphlets, speeches and books, ancient and modern, relating in any way to political economy, parliamentary history, reform or logic. Mr. Jevons was accidentally drowned only a few hours after his last purchases. Was it Mr. Gladstone, he could carry all subjects in his great mind, on his broad intellectual shoulders, and the inside pockets of his overcoat when filled with purchases would make a modern student hold up his hands with alarm.

From early youth I had taken great interest in subjects connected with Palestine and the East and ventured so far as to deliver a lecture before a large audience, and to my surprise read a report of the same after my return to London, in the newspapers. Some years later I was brought into contact with Miss Mary Eliza Rogers. This lady had spent many years in Syria, her brother, Mr. E. T. Rogers, being British Consul at Damascus. Miss Rogers herself was the author of a charming volume, "Domestic Life in Palestine." The second edition was published in 1863. One fine morning I greeted this lady and was introduced to Yacob Esh

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Shelaby, recently arrived from Nablous. The presence of the tall and stately patriarch of the Samaritans in the old book shop, in the flowing robes of his order, created something of a sensation. After this introduction we met on several occasions during his stay in England, and I was enabled to assist my interesting visitor to a good copy of "Richardson's Arabic Dictionary." An interesting account of Yacob and the modern Samaritans, by Mr. Rogers, was published in 1855; also in "Wilson's Lands of the Bible." Yacob presented me with a memento made from an olive tree, which I have to this day.

Some years previous to my commencing business I read a volume of lectures by Dr. Charles Pettit McIlvaine, Bishop of Ohio, and it was a pure accident that I called at the house of his daughter, Mrs. Messer, Carlton Hill, St. John's Wood, and discovered this good man then and there. His life, by Rev. W. Carus, is well-known. I am spoken of in the work, but my name does not appear.

Taking great interest in Biblical subjects and Christian evidences, I published the *Shield of Faith*, which was carried on for several years. In this difficult undertaking I received assistance from many able men of established reputation and known scholarship. Mr. B. Harris Cowper, formerly editor with Mr. Burgess of the *Journal of Sacred Literature*, contributed many articles on the Early Fathers and Christian Literature of the first three centuries. Alexander Stuart contributed many articles. The Rev. Brewin Grant, Dr. George

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Sexton, G. M. Turpin, David Blyth and many other able champions of the Christian faith, including converts from infidelity, were contributors to its pages. After much experience and considerable success in London, it was decided to commence a branch of the business in Toronto, feeling assured that friends of the best authors of ancient and modern times, and seminaries of learning would take advantage and derive lasting benefit from our endeavors in bringing the books to their doors. This we have done and the first systematic issuing of a second-hand bookseller's catalogue in Canada was commenced with No. 1, in January, 1885, and has been circulated continuously until the commencement of the great war. Thus we have issued nearly three hundred catalogues, numbered consecutively, some having prefaces on the advantages of reading the best books. During the thirty-eight years of our business in Toronto we have imported considerably over a million volumes of books, mostly of the last and preceding centuries, in various languages, from England, and have paid ocean and railway freight charges on nearly three hundred tons on the same, the books having been purchased by private individuals, public libraries and other institutions in the United States and Canada. We are unspeakably thankful to have been the medium of imparting so much lasting pleasure and knowledge, with little or no evil, and earnestly and sincerely tender our thanks to our very many friends and correspondents from whom we have received so much kindness and so many kind letters

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of encouragement and commendation, including press notices in England and America during the past fifty Years.

In 1899, *The Mail and Empire*, Toronto, replying to a correspondent who was enquiring of the whereabouts of the old bookshop, ultimately published an article part of which is as follows: "The old bookshop I wrote about is that of John Britnell, 280 Yonge Street. It is a delightful haunt of mine, and is indeed a treasure-house full of the rarest of all treasures . . . . . Piled three deep upon the floor of the old shop lie fat bags bursting with books which gape through the spaces between the stitches that confine them, as though longing to be taken out and aired. They have just come from a long tossing by land and sea, and are full of the dry rot and damp rot of Holywell Street and Paternoster Row, and quaint city alleys dim and fog-ridden. But there is no room for them, for all about you are knee-deep in books and prints and ancient manuscript. All across and through the dim recesses of the old bookshop stand shelves laden with dusty treasures of incomparable value, and seated in the midst of them—like the Spirit of the Books—I discern a gentle old figure with that look of pale refinement on the face that tells of communings with the Immortals. An old man—though not so very old either, but that he can dive at a moment's notice into a very burrow of books and fetch out the very tome—sere and yellow and best beloved—that you have been for so long wearily looking. A dreamer, is this

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simple, gentle soul, bending there, over his little table, in the deep, dim heart of the shop, surrounded by mighty old black-letter volumes, vellum-covered. Lost to the world, to its dickering and chaffering, and noise and vulgarity, he hardly hears you address him till you ask him for some of his older treasures. Then to see the light glow in the faded eyes, and the life come full and quick to the wan face, that a moment before looked still and almost deathlike! And not that he thinks that in you he finds a customer—for this strange and unreal person, so unlike the rest of humanity, does not seem to care so much for the coin the selling of one of his precious gods will bring him, as that you show interest in his treasures. If you are a lover of books he will discourse with you by the hour, will dig out his literary gods and display them to you, pointing out this and that—the ancient vellum covers, the fineness of the printing, the exquisite delicacy of the old engravings, the date on the fly-leaf, where the aged book came from and what its history. You may buy or you may not. So long as you love and delight in the ancient, treasure-filled shop you may ramble where you like. The whole place—with the Spirit of the Books himself—has been lifted out of the heart of old London. Just here is a ponderous Bible that bears the arms of Charles II., and, indeed, once belonged to the Merry Monarch; here is another Holy Book—a marvellously bound “breeches” Bible with very wonderful initial lettering, and delicate engravings that are incomparably finer than anything that is pro-



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duced now. Here again is a great vellum volume—a manuscript—over seven hundred years old, with its red and blue ink script still as bright and clear as when the hand of mediæval monk first limned it. Here are books that were handled and perused by our own first English printer—William Caxton—great books, bound in oak, with illuminated capitals, and bearing the arms of Kings, Popes, and Cardinals. All the libraries of the world have sent one or more representatives to this ancient and delightful book mart.”

“How I love them. Of all my friends they are the oldest, the most kind and the most faithful. I have joyfully and sacredly kept their company through all changes for upwards of fifty years. In sickness they have been more to me than medicine, and in sorrow and bereavement they have been at once my solace and my joy. In business their advice at times has been unexpected and disappointing, yet they proved themselves to be my surest and kindest guides. Here I meet and converse with the best and wisest of men of all ages; they tell me about their cities, kings, armies, politics and revolutions, and their magnificent temples, and I gaze with admiration and astonishment at the marvellous panorama. Their authors, although some of them hundreds of years in their graves, accompany, guide and protect me the world over, and I attend to the recital of their adventures with breathless interest never to be forgotten. Here may be seen a score of beautiful volumes printed when Columbus was in his prime, and I have not

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the slightest doubt but that some of these monuments of the past have been handled and perused by our own first English printer, William Caxton, Wynkyn de Worde, Martin Luther and his friend Philip Melancthon, Shakespeare and Locke, Bacon, Boyle and Milton; Racine and Moliere being as yet unborn. What histories they are in themselves, often times bound in oak, having illuminated capitals and bearing the arms of popes, kings and cardinals. They have followed the birth of nations, the downfall of kingdoms, and in some instances have followed in silence the funeral procession of their own originators to the block. They furnish me with endless instruction and amusement, and, when overcome with care, they bid the storm of my heart be still. How often am I pained when I see such friends and companions slighted or abused with levity and vandalism. All are welcome to this rich intellectual repast, and I bespeak for them the respect I myself bestow."—(*Preface to Catalogue No. XVII., February, 1892.*)

I have done the best I could under the superintending and guiding hand of Divine Providence and I feel the best has been done. It is impossible to enumerate or to tender our thanks to the many friends we have made in passing along through life. I do not remember an enemy I have encountered or made, and if it were possible to commence life over again, I should, with little alteration or deviation, travel the same unpretending, peaceful path in company with my books.



Come see my books and read with me,  
And let us feast and talk together,  
From care and strife we shall be free,  
And have no thoughts about the weather.