The
Private Library

The Quarterly Journal of the Private Libraries Association

Volume 2  1958-9
edited by Roderick Cave

28 Parkfield Crescent, North Harrow, Middlesex

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Criticisms

In the last issue of The Private Library, there was a letter from B. S. Marston, in which he complained that most of the articles published previously were of too technical a nature for the average member of PLA. With the letter, I printed a note asking for readers' comments — and I am glad to say I have received them.

The general reaction was, if Mr. Marston did not like the articles printed, why did he not send me one himself. In fact, he did so with his letter, and I am glad to print it now. Several members agreed with his criticisms of the type of article published: 'I don't want the technical articles to be less technical (I hate a watered-down, "popular" treatment), but I would like a slightly larger proportion of articles about books as things to read' was one member's comment. All, however, seem to want a certain number of 'technical' articles.

With Mr Marston's remarks on bibliomaniacs there was in general less sympathy. H. E. James points out that libraries formed of finely-illustrated books, or of beautiful bindings, are not less respectable than those formed for reading, and says that the collector however maniacal, treasures his books. Another member commented that Mr Marston is lucky indeed if he knows what the 'average member' wants, as she wants information about her fellow-members' collections more than anything else — while another said that articles on other peoples' collections are a complete bore to her.

This correspondence has been very useful to me, and I hope that future issues of The Private Library will profit from the suggestions I have received. Obviously I won't satisfy every member with each issue — but if I never do so, write and tell me!

October 1958
Association Affairs

Exchange Scheme Developments

As a result of the general satisfaction expressed by members with the April 'Offers Cumulated', October will see the publication of the first complementary 'Desiderata Cumulated' announced in the January number of this journal. Taking the place of the normal bi-monthly Exchange List, 'Desiderata Cumulated' will contain a select list of unsatisfied wants from the previous twelve lists, together with all wants submitted to the List Editor since August. Offers of books for sale and exchange and free offers will consequently be held over until December, when the Exchange List will revert to four sections. The provisional publications schedule reads: October, 'Desiderata Cumulated'; December, List 14; February 1959, List 15; April 1959, 'Offers Cumulated'.

Second Annual General Meeting

A record number of members attended the second Annual General Meeting and Lecture of the Association held in the library of London University on July 10th. The meeting elected the officers and the Council to serve for a further period. The Chairman's report alluded to the substantial progress made since the last Annual General Meeting.

J. H. P. Pafford's lecture on 'A Modern University Library' was of exceptional interest, and in the time available it was impossible to elaborate more than a few of the problems of a large university library, catering as it does for undergraduates, graduates, and research workers. By courtesy of the University authorities, members present were conducted around the new Louis Sterling library, being given the opportunity to examine many of the treasures of this fine private library.

Publications Fund

The recent improvement in format of The Private Library, formerly PLA Quarterly, has been made possible by donations to our Publications Fund. In order to maintain this standard, the Chairman wishes to repeat the appeal for 5/- from each member made at this time last year, and to thank all members for their very generous response. In addition, the Council desires to express its appreciation to the following for recent donations to the Fund: A.C.B., R.A.I.J., S.K.N., W.H.R., E.A.S., A.E.W.

Can any member advise? I wish to send 300 books of assorted sizes to Cornwall, Ontario, from my flat in Edinburgh. I shall not be there to pack them and I want to pay all expenses at this end. Time is no object, but money is.

A.T. (PLA No. 53)

October 1958

COMMONPLACE BOOKS

by B. S. Marston

"Quicquid bene dictum est ab ullo, meum est" (Seneca. Epist. XVI. 7)

The stock of significant ideas of which a man is capable is limited, and the number of things worth saying is limited. Language being also a limited commodity, it follows that there are not many ways of saying not many things. Probably the best ways of saying most things have already been discovered, and it merely remains for us to collect together these discoveries which are scattered like ten thousand (or so) needles in several square miles of haystack.

To effect this collection, a Commonplace Book is necessary. In this you write down anything you come across in the course of your reading which strikes you as beautiful, profound, clever or amusing. You also enter the name of the author and, if you can be bothered, the date and perhaps, as an extreme measure, the place where you were when you chanced upon the item in question.

This last is worthwhile in order to build up an association of ideas which helps to fix the item in your mind and provides it with what we may call an environment, wildly incongruous though the latter may sometimes be. For instance, certain passages of Housman still retain for me a special flavour (and even smell) on account of having been first read in the entrails of a troop ship and entered in the Commonplace Book there and then. Similarly, I seem to get something more out of A. N. Whitehead when my Commonplace Book reminds me how he accompanied me on the top of a London bus. The process works in reverse too: the splendours of Kashmir are further enhanced - improbable though that may seem - when I associate them with Morley's Life of Gladstone.

One of the problems is to ration the number of needles extracted from the haystack; crooked and rusty ones and those through whose eyes camels have tried to pass, must be eliminated. This is very necessary or the Commonplace Books will multiply too fast. This makes it difficult for the compiler to retain his familiarity with the entries; when that happens he tends to lose interest and loss of interest kills stone dead. Fifty average size pages per annum is sufficient for ordinary practitioners. Addicts will run to many more and incorporate diary entries and press cuttings.

However, even exercising great restraint, one is liable to get into difficulties. An index becomes necessary, but an Author index is both useless and pointless; I have discovered after making one. A Subject index is too complicated. I intend to leave the matter until my old age and then to make an anthology of his familiarity with the entries; when that happens he tends to lose interest and leaving only the pure gold. This plan commends itself in one way, for one of the rather shattering things that one learns from old Commonplace Books is how one's taste and opinions change. 'Did I really think that was funny?' I ask myself. 'Commonplace indeed, I'll say.' Why on earth did I copy out that bit? Surely I cannot have thought it true or good or beautiful. But yet I must have done, and perhaps it is, and
perhaps others (wiser than I) would think so too. Maybe I am getting senile or humourless. No, this subsequent selection is not going to work well.

Perhaps we shall arrive at an answer if we consider the object of the operation. One might do a Colin Wilson and write a learned-seeming book full of high faluting, esoteric quotations. I tried this once, and my Tutor at Cambridge said that it reminded him of boarding-house coffee: the same old grounds brewed up a second time. It would be nice to review books and be able to say at frequent intervals: 'As So and-so pertinently remarks . . .' Our author has not borne in mind the penetrating observation of Mr . . .' But this brings us back to the need for an index so as to be able to locate the apposite snippet without too much research. And we have had enough of that.

So far as our writing goes, let us read, mark and inwardly digest, but not learn (by heart) the contents of our Commonplace Books, and let us abandon, for the most part, quotation and direct reference. Rather, let us be so steeed say at frequent intervals: 'As So and-so pertinently remarks . . .' Without too much research. And we have had a second time. It would have not borne in mind the penetrating observation of Mr . . .'

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but it is a mere memory of what happened a quarter of a century ago, and I am prepared to be corrected—and a few weeks later it was sold at Sotheby's for something like £320, because the pages were still uncut. I respect this kind of collecting; but it is not my kind. I have tried to make it a rule never to buy a book unless I intend to read it, and not to buy another lot of books till I have read the last lot. I have some four thousand volumes, collected over some forty years. If I had read them all, it would work out at two volumes a week, year in and year out; so I must have allowed myself some latitude. Some hundreds which I inherited from my father I have kept, but I certainly have not read them all. Sets of volumes do not have to be read all through to justify their position on the shelves. If I have read several chapters out of the twelve volumes of *The Cambridge Modern History* (which I in fact inherited from my father), that 'counts'. So too it may 'count' if I have read one or two of the plays in the six volume *Nonesuch* Press edition of Dryden's *Dramatic Works*, which I quite recently bought, with the pages uncut.

I bought one or two of the less expensive Nonesuch books when they first began to be published after the 1914-18 war, and have added a few more since. Recently too I have indulged in some of the elegantly produced, luxuriously bound Golden Cockerel Press books. They are articles of virtu which one enjoys and cherishes rather as one does a piece of china. I have a few Elzevirs and such like, and an assortment of modern first editions. But these are the accidentals, as it were, among the rows of ordinary, workaday volumes. When I look through some of the catalogues of Fine Books that I receive from time to time, I wonder who the people are who are able to buy these valuable objects, so highly prized and priced on account of their rarity, sumptuous bindings, fine illustrations, or unique associations. A few score of them would be worth all the contents of my cluttered shelves.

Well, there it is—a library, it may be called by courtesy; a problem certainly to me the owner, or rather a whole bundle of problems. Shall I replace my cheap editions of the poets with other copies in the more luxurious format which the contents deserve—and if I do, shall I read them again? Or shall I make up my mind at present very weak and patchy collection of French authors? I have long wanted a well bound set of Balzac. Or shall I concentrate on the field of pre-history and early civilization, which is my special interest? To do so means buying generally rather expensive new books, which will be worth much less second hand. Or shall I go in for binding the many paper-covered books and periodicals I have, and repairing the various damaged leather-bound volumes that disgrace my shelves? Such are my problems. I shall never solve them. After all a problem which is solved ceases to be interesting.

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PRIVATE SCRIPTURE VERSIONS IN ENGLISH

by Walter A. Coslet

My interest in English translations of the Bible dates back to 1941 when I was 'exposed' to New Testament Greek and the existence of English translations thereof more up-to-date than the common King James version. I decided to obtain other English versions and make interlinear comparisons of them, since I couldn't spend years trying to obtain mastery of the original languages of the Bible, myself.

The first decade was slow, as I knew of few sources of supply, had no guide to what versions there had been, and was unable to locate others with a similar interest. This was changed by the March, 1953, issue of *Friends*, which contained a photo and writeup of the Bible collection of Professor Paul E. Keen, of Naperville, Illinois. Among Bible collectors with whom I put me in contact were O. M. Oriie who had recently mimeographed his own translation of the New Testament, and Ora Huston who travels constantly and has had personal contact with several collectors and translators. That summer I published a title-page checklist of the versions in my collection, running over twenty-five pages.

By 1955 I was able to publish a 20 page wants list, but I still regularly discover unrecorded versions in the sale lists I receive. Besides authorised translations, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish, I now have about 50 Bibles, a dozen Old Testaments, and 120 New Testaments. However, I have not limited my field to complete Bibles and Testaments, but include any differing English portion, large or small, wherever found. This has expanded my field to include Josephus' works (about 15 versions) for his *Antiquities* paraphrase much of the Old Testament; Church Fathers for they often quote Scripture differently, and works 'excluded' from the Bible. Naturally, I include any Commentary which incorporates its own translation. To many, a particularly old or costly volume is the prize item, but my favourites are the strikingly different translations, particularly those that strive to bring out the full meaning of the original idiomatically in modern English, such as G. W. Wade's 1934 *Documents of the New Testament*. I have a few early items, such as Udall's translation of Erasmus' *Paraphrase upon the New Testament* (1548-49), and microfilms of some of the high-priced rarities such as Richard Taverner's 1539 Bible, but a modern facsimile or reprint is of much value to me as a copy of the original edition, and often more convenient.

I do, of course, include 'authorised' versions in my collection, and the anonymous revision editions thereof (such as the King James 1611 Roman letter folio and the 1629 Cambridge Bible) but I do not collect editions which presumably represent editorial changes in the translation. Such minor changes, silently inserted, seem to have been common place up to the 18th century but apparently died out with Dr Paris' and Blayney's revisions of 1762 and 1798.

English translations and paraphrases of Scripture by private individuals is a much larger field than generally imagined. Most books on the history of the English Bible cover the field up to 1611, then skip to the Revised version of 1881-85, and perhaps mention a few of the better-known private efforts. This
means that some two-hundred New Testaments or larger portions of Scripture, and the translators who produced them, have been ignored, forgotten; not to mention perhaps a thousand other translators whose work was limited to smaller portions of the Bible. The private efforts were at low ebb during the century following the King James version (Haik's Bible, several editions of Hammond's, Baxter's, and Whithby's New Testaments, and Ainsworth's and Patrick's smaller portions) but they have increased continually each following century.

Perhaps the hardest translations to trace are the Jewish versions. Many are completely anonymous and must be compared to ascertain new revisions. Also, few of them ever seem to be reported in the cumulative lists of books published. Among these may be mentioned the version 'translated in accordance with Jewish Tradition' published in 1947. Orna Huston even visited the publishers in an attempt to obtain copies, but they claimed to have no knowledge of the book!

But versions exhibit another difference than the variations of expression provided by the translator. Much depends on the text translated, for there are variations in early manuscripts and consequently in printed editions, and in the selection of the text preferred and the arrangement of the translation by the individual translator, sometimes to show the results of modern 'higher' critical theories, but more often to conform as closely as possible, by means of the 19th-century methods of relief print making, and as such makes an excellent companion to Buckland-Wright's Etching and Engraving.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this book for the bibliophile is its two-hundred-odd illustrations. These are superbly printed, many from the original blocks, and together form a remarkable gallery of contemporary wood-engravings and woodcuts. Although some are familiar, many have not appeared in England before, some of the Russian and Jugoslav work is especially stimulating. The author and publishers are to be congratulated on the quality of this volume.

J. M.


These lectures were delivered as part of a series on the history of English libraries, and claim no more than to shed light on the early days of British community libraries by examining the work and achievement of three men none of whom, let it be remarked, played a prominent role in the cause of the liberation of Italy. It was only then that he was appointed principal librarian of the Museum. There is not a great deal in this essay that can claim originality, but it is convenient to have so much relevant material in a single essay.

W. A. Munford’s “George Birkbeck and Mechanics’ Institutes” pays disproportionate attention to the nomenclature of these early workmen’s educational societies, emphasizing the absence of uniformity also evident in the early days of public libraries. There is a useful passage on the Manual for Mechanics’ Institutes published in 1839 by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge; as Munford quotes with aptness Dickens’ scathing commentary on the ‘Dulborough’ M.I. in the Uncommercial Traveller. The third lecture is by Simon Nowell-Smith, entitled ‘Carlyle and the London Library’, it adds very little to Frederic Harrison’s account of the same title published in 1907 by Christie and long out of print. The London Library was founded in 1841 to enable scholars to read books otherwise available only in

REVIEW


One of the most remarkable things about the sometimes rather self-conscious typographical renaissance which started in the twenties has been the continued success of the wood engraving as a medium of illustration, and the almost complete failure of the woodcut to challenge its younger brother. Mr. Biggs’ new book is an extremely valuable treatise on the techniques of both and methods of relief print making, and as such makes an excellent companion to Buckland-Wright’s Etching and Engraving.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this book for the bibliophile is its two hundred-odd illustrations. These are superbly printed, many from the original blocks, and together form a remarkable gallery of contemporary wood-engravings and woodcuts. Although some are familiar, many have not appeared in England before, some of the Russian and Jugoslav work is especially stimulating. The author and publishers are to be congratulated on the quality of this volume.

One of the most curious things about the private press movement in this country has been the way in which the presses’ owners have nearly all been impelled to issue an edition of the Rubaiyat or The Song of Songs. Hardly a press before the war failed to issue one or the other. Yet here the Golden Cockerel Press is issuing its second Rubaiyat! Can it be justified?

It can, and is, by this superbly produced new folio. Printed by the Chiswick Press in Caslon Old Face, the paper, presswork and layout are as good as we have come to expect from ‘Cockerels’ – very good. To many tastes the illustrations will be too individual an interpretation of Omar’s poem; it is my private opinion that there is a small group of books which it is impossible to illustrate satisfactorily, and this is one of them. This new edition, charming as it is, has not persuaded me otherwise, but certainly the drawings harmonise with the text admirably. With Fitzgerald’s introduction and notes to the first edition included, this volume deserves a place on anyone’s shelf.

R. C.
Notes and queries

Who can identify 'a book about the cinema, by Anita Loos and her husband John Emerson', heard of at least 20 years ago?

A.T.

Compton, Jemima (pseud.) The Ups and Downs of an Old Maid's Life, 8vo, Bell and Dally 1868. The British Museum Catalogue calls this 'an imaginary autobiography by Mrs George Gladstone'. Can anyone tell me how far it really is imaginary? To my mind most of this book rings true.

A.T.

Aberdeen. When visiting here do not miss 'Cockie' Hunter's celebrated second-hand stores at 10 Castle Terrace. This tall houseful of romantic Squalor overlooking the harbour does not specialise in books and may have none when you call; but it is just as likely to yield an out-of-print book you have wanted for years at a price of 1/-.

A.T.

Bespoke Bookcase. In 1955 I flitted with 800 books into a small flat in an 1827 Edinburgh tenement. The sitting-room is odd but agreeable; one blank wall is curved while the three containing door, windows and fire-place are recessed in the usual Georgian manner. A book-case to hold all my books (even if it could be got up the stairs and in at the door) could stand only against the curved wall, thus at one blow wasting space and killing the personality of the room, so I decided to have one built right round the curved wall. The Scottish Craft Centre at Acheson House, in the Canongate, gave me the names of several of their cabinet-maker members. I picked the nearest, who proved to be a man of imagination as well as skill. His first question was 'Do you want this book-case to look like an article of furniture or like part of the room?' Now one complete wall of my room is lined with books to a height of six feet and another tier can be added later if needed. For this infinitely satisfying craftsman's job I had to pay hardly more than for the corresponding number of units of a mass-produced sectional book case.

A.T.

Swedish Royal Library. On 12 May 1958 the library of the Royal Palace in Stockholm – which has developed from private royal collections of the 16th century – was newly opened, restored and redecorated, with modern lighting added to that of its original crystal chandeliers. Already in 1875, when the library was described by Strindberg, it filled the entire north-eastern wing of the palace. It has the appearance of an immensely high, long and wide gallery of deep amber-coloured oak (described by Strindberg as beech). The twelve great windows overlook the rushing waters of Strommen. It was here, in 1786, that the Swedish Academy (so greatly detested by Bernad Shaw) was founded, and continued to hold its meetings for many years. The recent opening, presided over by King Gustaf Adolf and Queen Louise, was the occasion of the annual meeting of Nationalmusei Vänner (Friends of the National Museum). The royal library will be used in future for meetings of certain learned societies lacking suitable quarters of their own.

The books are arranged according to the monarchs who collected them: from Gustav III and Karl XIII up to Oscar I, whose speciality was prison and social reform; and the late Gustaf V, whose collection is mostly of travel books, history and memoirs. Sweden has three other major research libraries, the oldest being that of Uppsala University (1620), Lund University (1671), and Göteborg University (1890). Uppsala has over one million bound volumes and about 34,000 metres of shelving.

C.M.

Normanton. In reading through a pamphlet issued by the Friends of the UCLA Library (Los Angeles 1953) about the dedication ceremonies of the Sadleir collection I came across a reference in glowing terms to a book of this title, by A. J. Barrowcliffe, published in 1862. Can any reader tell me anything about it or its author?

R.C.

Illustrations File. A footnote to Philip Ward's splendid article, Newspapers often have a whole page of pictures which is worth keeping but hard to store flat. A cheap and easily-made file for them is the largest type of carrier bag from the big multiple shops, with cardboard pasted over both sides to stiffen it. Into this you can put a whole page of newspaper folded once horizontally and not at all vertically, I have one 172" wide which will take the Scotsman and the Canard Enchaîné next and the Observer with a little margin-trimming.

A.T.
Horrid Novels. In my collection there is an edition of Peter Will's Horrid Mysteries; a story from the German of the Marquis of Grosse, with an introduction by Montague Summers, and published by Robert Holden and Co. in 1927. It is in two volumes, bound in pseudo-yellowback style, lettered at the top of the spine 'The Horrid Novels'. I believe it was Holden's intention to issue all the Northanger novels in this series: can anyone tell me which – if any – of the others did appear?

R.C.

Latin inscription. On an end flyleaf of a thirteenth century copy in my possession of the treatise by Guillaume Perault on the vices and the virtues, there occurs, amongst other additions of the fourteenth century, the following: 'O MORS QUAM DURA QUAM TRISTIA SUNT TUA JURA. NEMO TAM FORTIS QUI RUMPAT VINCULA MORTIS.' Any information as to the source or the author of this piece of melancholy would be very welcome.

B.S.C.

Orthodox liturgy. Dated minuscule Greek manuscripts of the eleventh century are of sufficient importance to justify a note in any journal. I am fortunate in having in my library an exceedingly fine Psalter of the Septuagint version, at the end of which is written, in a hand almost certainly not that of the main scribe, an inscription of which the following is a translation: 'On 9 March in the ninth indication in the year 6594 [=1086 A.D.] our holy lady received the tonsure.' The year given, of course, is that of the Constantinopolitan era. My manuscript may therefore be said to have been written not later than 1086. I do not know the full significance of the event recorded, and if any reader, learned in the liturgy and rites of the Eastern Church, could enlighten me, I would be most grateful.

B.S.C.

Marbled paper. In The binding of books (in the 'Books about books' series issued in 1894 by Routledge) Herbert Horne mentions (p.16) some marbled paper which was made by E. W. Morris of Oxford. Does any reader possess any of this paper, or know where it can be seen?

R.C.

Oscar Wilde. In sorting an accumulation of pamphlets I have come across the following which may be of interest to Oscar Wilde bibliographers as it contains on pages 19-24 a bibliography of Wilde's work in English and German: Die Bibliothek des Buchfreundes, 1906, No. 2, Gilhofer & Ranschburg, Wein, 48pp. Available on loan to anyone interested.

J.R.C.
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