

BOOKS AND BOOK LOVERS

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Books and Book Lovers by Ralph A. Lyon

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RALPH A. LYON

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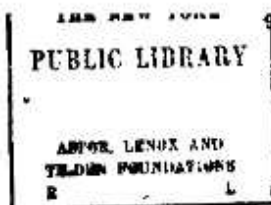
BOOKS
AND
BOOK LOVERS

COMPILED BY
RALPH A. LYON



EVANSTON
WILLIAM S. LORD
1903

EA. LB



"I thank God continually that it hath been my lot in life to found an empire in my heart—no cramped and wizened borough wherein one jealous mistress hath exercised her petty tyranny, but an expansive and ever widening continent divided and subdivided into dominions, jurisdictions, caliphates, chiefdoms, seneschalships, and prefectures, wherein tetrarchs, burgraves, maharajahs, palatines, seigniors, caziques, nabobs, emirs, nizams, and nawabs hold sway, each over his special and particular realm, and all bound together in harmonious co-operation by the conciliating spirit of polybibliophily!"

EUGENE FIELD.

[*The Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac.*]

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THE BIBLIOMANIAC*

HOW easily one may distinguish a genuine lover of books from a worldly man!

With what subdued and yet glowing enthusiasm does he gaze upon the costly front of a thousand embattled volumes! How gently he draws them down, as if they were little children; how tenderly he handles them! He peers at the title page, at the text, or the notes, with the nicety of a bird examining a flower. He studies the binding: the leather, russia, English calf, morocco; the lettering, the gilding, the edging, the hinge of the cover! He opens it and shuts it; he holds it off and brings it nigh. It suffuses his whole body with book

*From "Star Papers," by Henry Ward Beecher.

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magnetism. He walks up and down in a maze at the mysterious allotments of Providence, that gives so much money to men who spend it upon their appetites, and so little to men who would spend it in benevolence or upon their refined tastes! It is astonishing, too, how one's necessities multiply in the presence of the supply. One never knows how many things it is impossible to do without till he goes to Windle's or Smith's house-furnishing stores. One is surprised to perceive, at some bazaar or fancy and variety store, how many *conveniences* he needs. He is satisfied that his life must have been utterly inconvenient aforesaid. And thus, too, one is inwardly convicted, at Appletons', of having lived for years without books which he is now satisfied that one cannot live without!

Then, too, the subtle process by which the man convinces himself that he can afford to buy. No subtle manager or broker ever saw through a maze of financial embarrassments half so quick as a poor book-buyer sees his way clear to pay for what he *must* have. He promises himself marvels of retrenchment;

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he will eat less, or less costly viands, that he may buy more food for the mind. He will take an extra patch, and go on with his raiment another year, and buy books instead of coats. Yea, he will write books, that he may buy books! The appetite is insatiable. Feeding does not satisfy it. It rages by the fuel which is put upon it. As a hungry man eats first and pays afterward, so the book-buyer purchases and then works at the debt afterward. This paying is rather medicinal. It cures for a time. But a relapse takes place. The same longing, the same promises of self-denial. He promises himself to put spurs on both heels of his industry; and then, besides all this, he will *somehow* get along when the time for payment comes! Ah! this *SOMEHOW!* That word is as big as a whole world, and is stuffed with all the vagaries and fantasies that Fancy ever bred upon Hope. And yet, is there not some comfort in buying books, *to be* paid for? We have heard of a sot who wished his neck as long as the worm of a still, that he might so much the longer enjoy the flavor of the draught!

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Thus, it is a prolonged excitement of purchase, if you feel for six months in a slight doubt whether the book is honestly your own or not. Had you paid down, that would have been the end of it. There would have been no affectionate and beseeching look of your books at you, every time you saw them, saying, as plain as a book's eyes can say, "Do not let me be taken from you."

Moreover, buying books before you can pay for them promotes caution. You do not feel quite at liberty to take them home. You are married. Your wife keeps an account-book. She knows to a penny what you can and what you cannot afford. She has no "speculation" in *her* eyes. Plain figures make desperate work with airy "*somewhat*." It is a matter of no small skill and experience to get your books home, and into their proper places, undiscovered. Perhaps the blundering express brings them to the door just at evening. "What is it, my dear?" she says to you. "Oh! nothing—a few books that I cannot do without." That smile! A true housewife that loves her husband can

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smile a whole arithmetic at him in one look! Of course she insists, in the kindest way, in sympathizing with you in your literary acquisition. She cuts the strings of the bundle (and of your heart), and out comes the whole story. You have bought a complete set of costly English books, full bound in calf, extra gilt! You are caught, and feel very much as if bound in calf yourself, and admirably lettered.

Now, this must not happen frequently. The books must be smuggled home. Let them be sent to some near place. Then when your wife has a headache, or is out making a call, or has lain down, run the books across the frontier and threshold, hastily undo them, stop only for one loving glance as you put them away in the closet, or behind other books on the shelf, or on the topmost shelf. Clear away the twine and wrapping-paper, and every suspicious circumstance. Be very careful not to be too kind. That often brings on detection. Only the other day we heard it said, somewhere, "Why, how good you have been lately. I