

**EXCURSIONS IN LIBRARIA:
BEING RETROSPECTIVE
REVIEWS AND
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

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Excursions in Libraria: Being Retrospective Reviews and Bibliographical Notes by G. H. Powell

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G. H. POWELL

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POWELL

"For books, we know,
Are a substantial world."—*Wordsworth.*

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OF the papers which follow the first is reprinted from *Macmillan's Magazine* ("A Discourse of Rare Books," July, 1893), and the last, in part, from the *Pall Mall Magazine* (February, 1895), with the kind permission of the respective proprietors. Both articles are here presented in a revised and enlarged form, the latter, in fact, having been entirely rewritten.



PREFACE

SOME apology may be necessary for offering to the public, so abundantly supplied of late years with "books about books," another volume which can hardly help falling into that category. The present work, however, addresses itself (with all the misgivings of a first venture) rather to the humane interests of the general reader, than to what may respectfully be called the refined curiosities of the bibliophile, to the collector of books, that is, as books, and not as antiquities or objects of exoteric *virtù*,¹ in fine, to the bookbuyer who is also, and by virtue of his office, a "voracious" reader, even if he be not one of those

"*Bibliophagi*, or men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders"

from excessive application to study. "Excursions," in *Libraria* or elsewhere, do not profess to be explorations, or to serve any serious industrial demand, although (within their inevitable limits) the *notes de voyage* of one tourist may have a certain use and interest for others. This is the only excuse

¹ See Ch. I., pp. 15 and 31.

for publishing a selection of those "marked passages" and "marginal (or flyleaf) notes" which accumulate during the unconscious labour of love expended in years of book-collecting.

Two or three of the chapters that follow might be described as sketches of "periods" or of "lost points of view," illustrated from contemporary sources of the fourteenth, the sixteenth, and the eighteenth centuries respectively. The *Gascon Tragedy* and the *Pirate's Paradise* rehearse more or less well-known romances of history. In the longer essay on memoirs, and in those dealing with rare books (or rather the principles which govern the practice of book-buying), and with early mythological literature, a conscientious if misguided attempt has been made to present—in an inevitably discursive fashion, but with some sense of proportion—a general survey (from the point of view of the practical reader and collector), of a larger province of that "world of books" which, if not always as "pure and good" as the poetry of Mr. Wordsworth, is at least always human.

The insertion throughout the latter chapters of so many dates and parenthetical details will, I hope, be excused by readers who have these things at their fingers' ends, in consideration of those who, like the author, hanker after chronological landmarks along the highroads of—

"The dusty travelled past."

With regard to the criticisms and descriptions of books (old or modern), which occupy almost all the notes and a great part of the text of this volume, I need only say that the works familiarly cited and quoted are almost all in my own possession. These comprise possibly a few "out of the

way" books, and one or two such as are commonly called "rare," and might not be found even in reputable libraries. But I have not, except in the first chapter, referred to any work except on the ground that it was (to persons debarred from purchasing a more modern or more expensive edition) at least worth having, for reasons more fully diagnosed in the text.

In estimating the importance of form and typography as affecting the question whether the average individual is likely to read a book with pleasure or profit, or even to read it at all, and the considerable proportion of "old books" periodically in danger of being slighted or forgotten by all but their actual custodians, there is sometimes a danger of confounding *human* (that is historical, or literary) and merely "bookish" interest. In regard to the former, I have spared the reader no reference to any original work likely to rouse his interest or curiosity, though I fear I cannot add—his envy or regret.

Notes and references have thus, in spite of every desire to exclude vanities and repetitions, swelled to such a bulk, that the only excusable addition seemed an index, which is offered as an apology for the digressions of which several chapters are largely composed.

The "we" of the retrospective reviewer, inextricably embedded in the one long bibliographical article which has already appeared in print, has been allowed to permeate the text with no further idea than that of associating the reader in an amicable "voyage autour d'une bibliothèque choisie," of which imagination and the proximity of Bloomsbury have slightly extended the bounds.

Of the ornaments, devices, etc., with which my publishers