

ITALIAN AND ENGLISH BOOK COLLECTORS OF THE RENAISSANCE

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THE term "Renaissance" denotes that period of transition in European history from the Middle Ages to the Modern, and the sharply defined intellectual and moral revolt which bridged that transition. Literally, Renaissance means re-birth. Europe herself was re-born. For centuries she had been the queen of the world's civilization, but a bigoted, narrow-minded vixen of a queen. Scholasticism trammelled thought. Theological and feudal despotism held individual man in seemingly hopeless thralldom.

A wave of vital energy,—the gods forbid that anybody should dare to say whence it came—swept over Europe, quickening the people into life. An immediate result was the Revival of Learning. This term is often used interchangeably with Renaissance. Europe rediscovered her classic past, and for a moment attempted to return to the ideals of ancient Greece and Rome. Instead of doing this, however, she simply made these ideals clear to herself, and then proceeded to incorporate them in a larger intellectual scheme. Thus she became the cradle of our modern civilization. The European Renaissance was an expansive, progressive, mighty force. In its train came vaster, more beautiful conceptions of religion, a more universal philosophy, a great revival of natural science, and a long look into the possibilities of invention and discovery. Spiritual freedom was the key note of the new humanism that developed. Man endeavoured to reconstitute himself as a free being, not the slave of ecclesiastical authority, and in this endeavour he was wonderfully assisted by the study of the Greek and Latin literatures. He came to a juster conception of his own dignity, and of his rights upon the earth.

Thinkers naturally turn to books. A revived interest in books immediately preceded the Renaissance, and, when the new life began to stir, this interest rose to an unprecedented height. If books were few, they were valued. In inventories they were classed with plate and jewels. Few students could afford them, and in schools they were reserved exclusively for the masters. The first

university students in this new Europe depended solely upon oral instruction. Students sat literally at the feet of their masters, and often their only library consisted of the note-books they made themselves. An Oxford student, for instance, was admitted to the first University Library only after he had spent eight years in the study of philosophy. He must prove his power to use books before he might have them.

No one attempts to date the Renaissance with any pretence to exactness. To say it began with the fall of Constantinople in 1453 is a literary convention only. Chaucer certainly heralded the movement in England, and Dante in Italy. Perhaps we should cite the Italian poet first, for it was in Italy that the new life first appeared, bringing with it the worship of the old pagan ideal, inciting man to realize in himself a being of power and beauty. That energy and joy which still abound in the Italian expressed itself at the time of the Renaissance mainly as a passion for learning. The earliest great scholar of the age was Petrarch, born in 1304, seventeen years before the august Dante died. Petrarch was the first modern man to call the attention of the world to the importance of collecting ancient manuscripts, and he called it sharply. He it was who inaugurated the science of textual criticism. When a man read Plato let him make sure he read what the master had written, and not an ill trained copyist's garbled version. Thus he began that systematic search for old manuscripts which still goes on. He dug around old ruins looking for antiquities. He also made many journeys to monasteries where rare manuscripts mouldered in an age-long neglect. By corresponding concerning these he interested other scholars in them. The great libraries of Italy, including the Vatican at Rome and St. Mark's at Venice, owe to Petrarch their earliest impulse.

Many enthusiasts in book collecting followed in Petrarch's train. Niccolo de' Niccoli was a famous book lover and librarian. Most of his manuscripts he copied himself, a very labour of love. He cared jealously for his treasures, but he loved them greatly, and therefore he lent freely. When he died he left eight hundred manuscripts, which happily fell into the hands of Cosimo de' Medici, himself the founder of a great library at Venice. Cosimo placed four hundred of Niccoli's manuscripts in the library of St. Mark's, the remainder he distributed. Cosimo also founded a library in the Abbey of Fiesole.

Coluccio Salutato, for many years secretary to the Florentine state, was scarcely a book collector, but his pleasure in a fine handwriting, combined with the literary excellence of his public correspondence, give him an important place in the history of Italian

libraries. In his day it was said that a letter of Salutato was worth a thousand men; it may be inferred, therefore, that one manuscript letter of his was easily worth a thousand ephemeral tracts.

Palla degli Strozzi was probably the first of the moderns to bring together books expressly for a public library. He wished to place this library in Florence, in Santa Trinita, but misfortune came upon him and frustrated his plans.

Poggio Bracciolini, papal secretary during the time of the Great Schism, figured greatly as a collector. He was an outstanding type of the Renaissance man infected by the new humanism, the man we twentieth century people look at questioningly, unable to approve his ways but unable to dislike the man. Poggio was a brilliant, reckless scholar, a marvel of self-conceit, author of slippery stories and of the vilest invective, religious in his best moods, never altogether humble. He was a delightful enthusiast in his book collecting. As secretary and companion to Pope John XXIII he found and used an opportunity to explore the monasteries about Lake Constance, and as a result he saved for posterity many rare manuscripts. At Monte Cassino he rescued the only remaining copy of an ancient treatise on aqueducts.

It is impossible to catalogue all the Renaissance scholars of Italy who figured in the history of library institution. Many might wonder why we did not mention Boccaccio immediately after Petrarch. It is because Boccaccio's interests were those of the teacher and author rather than of the collector. Tommaso Parentucelli, afterwards Pope Nicholas V., was a man of far reaching ambition and various achievement, a man who attacked feverishly everything that related to the New Learning, and who gave himself unreservedly to the collection, the care, and the producing of books. He undertook to render the whole of the ancient Greek literature into the more familiar Latin. Professional scribes in shoals copied assiduously, producing many copies for general circulation. Every scholar could compose in Latin, and valued his Latin prose and verse far more than his attempts in the vernacular. Thus under Tommaso books and libraries accumulated. When this prelate died in 1455 he left one thousand one hundred and sixty volumes, three hundred and fifty-three of which were in Greek. It is worthy of note, too, that in his bedroom and study were found the works of ancient historians, poets, and philosophers, but not one theological work.

No account of Italian book collectors of the Renaissance is complete without a mention of Cardinal Bessarion, a scholar who loved his books with exclusive and jealous passion. He gathered together

rare and precious manuscripts, he studied, he copied, he translated, and he wrote. As death drew near he was exceedingly concerned about his treasures. To the end that no one should be able to alienate or dissipate them he chose to give them to Venice that they might be preserved in the sacred temple of St. Mark's. I quote from a letter Bessarion wrote in 1468 to the doge Cristoforo Moro, explaining his motives and announcing his decision. "Full of maxims, filled with the example of the ancients, teaching manners, laws, religion, these books live, they discourse, they talk with us. They instruct us, they form us, they console us; the past, thanks to them, becomes once more the present and rises before our eyes. So great is their power, so great their dignity, their majesty, their sanctity, that without them we should all remain merged in ignorance and barbarism; no memory would subsist of bygone days, no example would survive, no knowledge would remain of things human or divine; amid the ashes of funeral urns names too would disappear. Long pondering over these thoughts, but especially since the fall of Greece and the deplorable captivity of Byzantium, I devoted all my strength, all my care, all my resources to collecting Greek books." Bessarion's library was lodged under the shadow of St. Mark's, but after the fall of the campanile in 1902 it was moved to a building called the Zecca.

Italy took precedence of England and Northern Europe in book collecting, but we hesitate to say that her part in that work of the Renaissance was the greater one. No, for the English book collector paved the way for "the spacious times of great Elizabeth". The Italian bibliophile was essentially a scholar first and a book collector afterward; he might cease amassing books at any time that he wished to satiate his scholar's appetite by reading. England ushered in that wholly delightful and beloved type, the man who finds and amasses books as though guided by instinct rather than by reason, and who cares less to read than to collect. He may or may not be able to discuss the subject matter of a book, but he will unerringly appraise an ancient volume at its true value.

Such a man was Richard de Bury, an Englishman of the fourteenth century. Petrarch describes him as "a man of ardent temperament, not ignorant of literature, and with a strong natural curiosity for obscure and recondite lore". Now, de Bury himself would doubtless have quarreled with this estimate, for he considered that he ranked second to none of his age as a scholar. But true scholars, I fear, are rare, and are recognizable through our high instincts alone. If the sacred essence be not in a man, no reading or amassing of books will put it there. As I think of de Bury and read

about him I am more and more convinced that he was in soul a librarian rather than a scholar. The two are different as yet. When, in the evolution of the human race, the two combine in one person, then the cause of learning will have its saviour. But the librarian and the book-collector only were alive in de Bury. He spent money recklessly for books, though he collected only what was good. He had in his house continually copyists, correctors, binders, illuminators; manuscripts covered the floors so that he stepped over them in going to bed. As ardent librarians do to-day, he collected more books than he could possibly arrange in order. History credits him with having selected a library from his own collection and bestowing it upon Durham College. For the use of these books de Bury himself drew up rules. Some regard his foundation at Durham as the earliest circulating library in England, but a few monasteries had lent books on similar conditions long before.

de Bury, however, can scarcely be called a man of the Renaissance; he was a book lover who heralded it and prepared its way. The real Renaissance movement in England, in so far as it expressed itself in book collecting, began with Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who died in 1447, six years before the conventional date of the Renaissance. A princely figure was this "good Duke Humphrey", son of the first Lancastrian king. Shakespeare has immortalised his portrait and that of his wife, Eleanor Cobham. He shouldered the responsibilities incurred by his royal birth right manfully, and remained a good statesman throughout that stormy time, though harassed by public and domestic infelicity. His love of learning was deep and genuine, and he was an indefatigable collector of books. He was greatly interested in medicine. His other studies were in the Latin poets and authors, Latin versions of Plato and Aristotle, Italian poetry, astronomy. The only Greek book he possessed was a vocabulary. To the University of Oxford Duke Humphrey was a generous and consistent donor. In 1439 came his first great donation, consisting of one hundred and twenty-nine manuscripts. Forty of these were theological, fifty-six were scientific, and the remainder comprised works of Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Cicero, Aulus Gellius, Quintilian, and Apuleius. Of the scientific works one half or more treated of medicine. The University received the books gratefully, and within a few weeks statutes were drawn up for their good ordering. Later Duke Humphrey contributed towards a building where his collection could be permanently housed, and promised that at his death the University might have all his books. He died intestate, however, and his gift was obtained with difficulty. Only

half a dozen of the Duke's books now remain at Oxford, and only about twenty-nine are extant, but there is a room in the Bodleian still known as Duke Humphrey's Library. Most of his books perished in the religious fury of the Tudor period.

Another noble scholar of high estate who enriched the fifteenth century England with carefully selected books was John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester. As a chief justice of Edward IV. he perpetrated many cruelties, but when he himself went to the block in 1470 he proved that he could meet with a beautiful dignity the death he had so often decreed for others. As a scholar and orator he won great encomiums in cultivated Italy. He was an accomplished Latinist, and indeed resided in Padua for some time for the express purpose of studying that noble language. In this article we are concerned with him chiefly as a collector of books, but a collector of books, save he have scholarship and personality, ranks little higher than the workmen who pack them. Worcester gave dignity to book collecting. The largeness of his purchases in Italy was the talk of the *literati* there. He brought the books to England, where he made various dispositions of them, his largest gift being to the University of Oxford. He is said to have intended a present of books to Cambridge also, but it is not clear that they were received.

William Gray, sometime Bishop of Ely, was a noted Renaissance scholar and book-collector. Nicholas V, the Tommaso Parentucelli who became Pope, honoured this man with his friendship, and because of the sincere devotion to books that he found in him bestowed on him his bishopric. When Gray found a good book not available for purchase he employed a scribe to copy it for him. While at Florence he engaged an artist to adorn his books with miniatures and initials. He brought these books to England, and later with about two hundred of them he founded the library of Balliol College at Oxford. Over one hundred and fifty of these volumes are still in the college, though most of the miniatures were spoiled in the reign of Edward VI. and during the Great Rebellion.

About the time of Gray's death another English scholar, William Celling, went to Italy for the double purpose of studying and of collecting books. Before this he had been elected prior of Christ Church, Canterbury. While in Italy Celling collected both Latin and Greek manuscripts. Among other works was the one existing complete copy of Cicero's *Republic*. Celling restored the library over the prior's chapel for the reception of his treasures, but many of them were destroyed by fire a quarter of a century later. Among these was the precious "Republic".

The conditions of book publishing, and therefore of book collect-

ing, were entirely changed soon after the fall of Constantinople, 1453. Gutenberg set up his Mazarin Bible in print in 1456, some important Latin texts were published at Rome in 1469, by 1493 most of the greater Latin classics were in print. As printing presses began to abound books began to abound. Aldo Manuzio began a series of the Greek classics, and by 1518 no extant Greek or Latin work of high rank remained unprinted.

English book collecting of this later Renaissance centres about a brilliant group of Oxford scholars,—Thomas Linacre, John Colet, William Lilly, William Grocyn, and others.

Lilly and Grocyn each spent two years in Italy and each brought home books. An interesting catalogue of Grocyn's library was found in Merton College in 1889, and was afterwards printed for the Oxford Historical Society. The catalogue was made after Grocyn's death by his friend, Thomas Linacre. There were one hundred and five printed volumes and seventeen manuscripts. The works of St. Augustine have lavish representation in the catalogue, as have also Greek and Latin versions of the New Testament. There are commentaries, of course. Of the Christian Fathers there are, besides St. Augustine, nearly complete copies of Origen, Cyprian, Eusebius, Ambrose, Jerome, and Gregory the Great. The schoolmen are well represented,—Anselm, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Ockham, Bonaventure, and Nicholas de Lyra. Cicero holds the first place in the Latin classics, but all the leading authors are there with him. The only Greek books on the list are Aristotle and Plutarch. There are several books on astronomy, several Italian works, and the *Adagia* of Erasmus. A few of Grocyn's manuscripts were purchased for Corpus Christi College, and may still be found in the library there. Grocyn's property, after a few bequests to friends, was left to Linacre with the injunction "to bestow such part thereof for the wele of my soule and the soules of my fader, moder, benefactors, and all Xtian soules as it shall please him". Linacre regarded the trust as sacred. He provided relief for the poor in whom Grocyn was interested, and with the remainder he purchased books at Louvain for distribution among studious Oxford scholars, and also gave "Master Lilly" forty pounds to procure Greek books to give away.

It is difficult to say just when the Renaissance period closed, but I have now reached the limit I imposed upon myself for this essay. It would have been a delight to go beyond Italy and England in my researches, for Spain, France, and the countries of Northern Europe had also at this time their bibliophiles. But, as it was necessary to confine myself to sketches of individual men, it seemed better not to make the monograph long. The subject is too vital to risk that

palling of interest which invariably arises from the massing of much detail. May I be allowed a few words, however, concerning the care and reverence these book-collectors of a former age gave their treasures? Books to them were sacrosanct. "Take thou a book into thine hands", wrote Thomas à Kempis, "as Simeon the Just took the Child Jesus into his arms to carry him and kiss him. And, when thou hast finished reading, close the book and give thanks for every word out of the mouth of God, because in the Lord's field thou hast found a hidden treasure". An unknown writer or copyist thus entreats readers to be careful of his work: "I beseech you, my friend, when you are reading my book to keep your hands behind its back, for fear you should do mischief to the text by some sudden movement, for a man who knows nothing about writing thinks it is no concern of his. Whereas to a writer the last line is as sweet as port to a sailor. Three fingers hold the pen but the whole body toils. Thanks be to God. I, Warembert, wrote this book in God's name. Thanks be to God. Amen." Curses were more common than such gentle entreaties. Here are two specimens: "May whoever steals or alienates this manuscript, or scratches out its title be anathema. Amen". "Should anyone by craft or any device whatever abstract this book from this place, may his soul suffer in retribution for what he has done, and may his name be erased from the book of the living and not be recorded among the Blessed!" But, if maledictions followed the book thief, blessings were continually invoked on the donor. In the library records of monasteries there is every evidence that when books were given they were received with deep and sincere gratitude. The books themselves were invested with the qualities of living beings; they were bestowed with care; they were jealously guarded from the touch of the vulgar; they were made accessible to the real student; they were treated by the librarian as guests whom a king would delight to honour.