

Who spoils our new English books / asked and answered by Henry Stevens of Vermont.

Contributors

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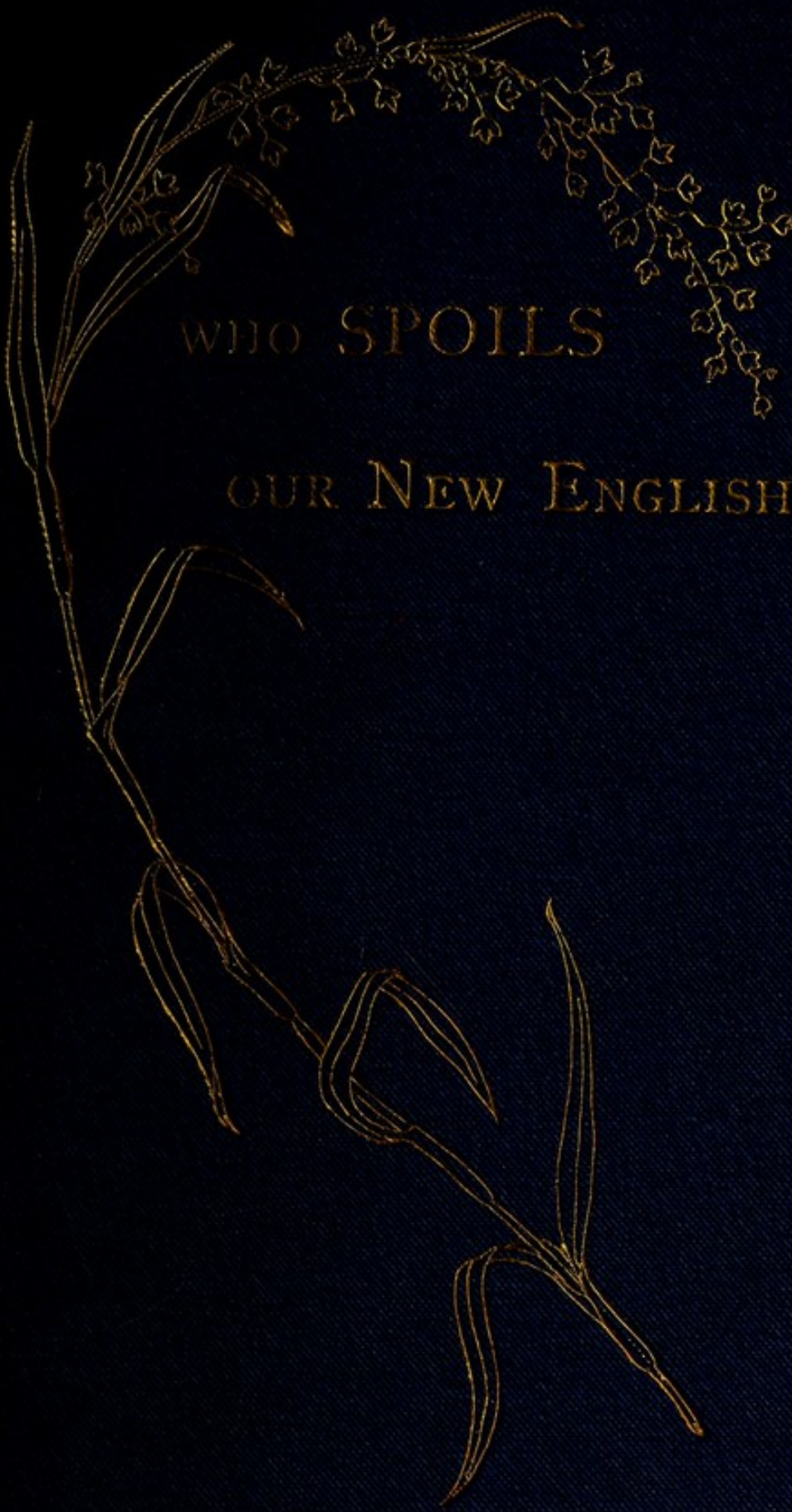
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WHO SPOILS

OUR NEW ENGLISH BOOKS



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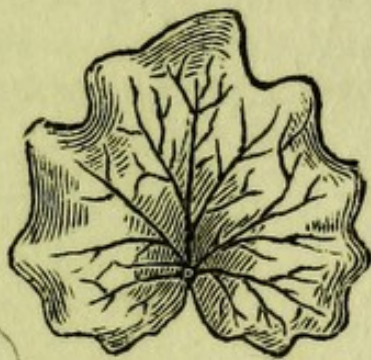






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With the regards and best Wishes
of the Author

Harry Stevens of Vermont

New Years 1885.

Neither does it so much require book-learning
and scholarship, as good natural
sense, to distinguish
true and false.

Burnet

An appeal lies in this case. *Parsons*



WHO SPOILS OUR
NEW ENGLISH BOOKS



*A Book 'Gives to airy nothings
A local habitation and a name.'*
Shakspeare

Whom Satan hath bound.
Luke xiii 16

For the book-trade is running into a smithery
among us. *Sir James Stephen*

WHO SPOILS OUR NEW ENGLISH BOOKS

Asked and Answered by

HENRY STEVENS of Vermont

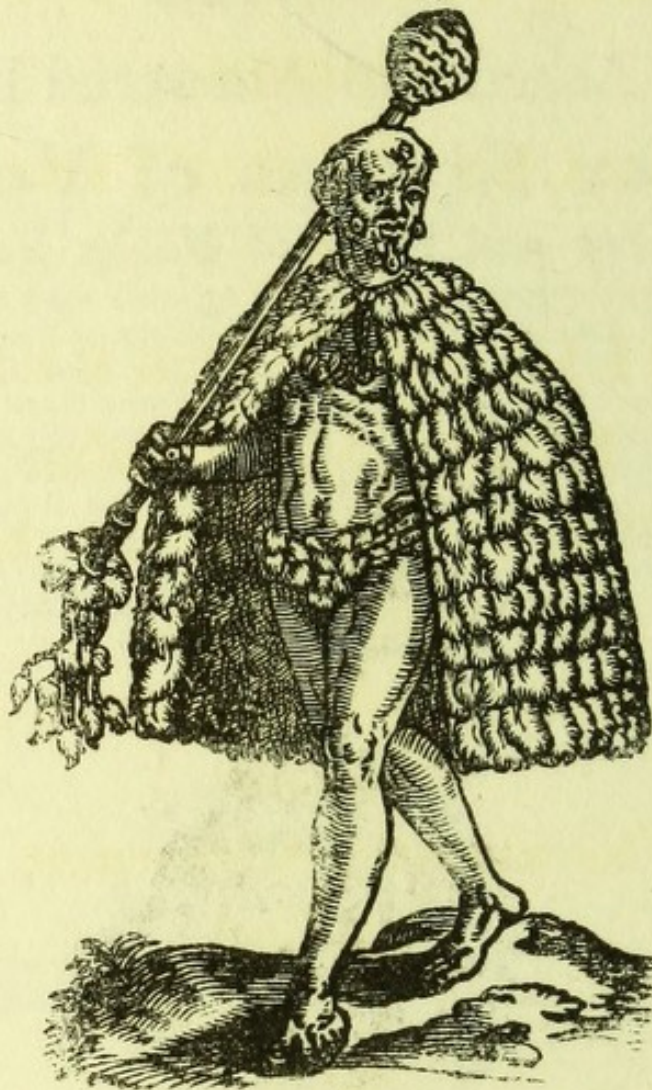
Bibliographer and lover of Books Fellow of the
Society of Antiquaries of Old England and Corresponding
Member of the American Antiquarian Society of New England of the
Massachusetts Historical Society and of the New England Genealo-
gical Society Life Member of the British Association for the Advance-
ment of Science Fellow of the British Archæological Association
and the Zoological Society of London Black Balled Athenæum
Club of London also Patriarch of Skull & Bones of Yale
and Member of the Historical Societies of Vermont
New York Wisconsin Maryland &c &c BA
and MA of Yale College as well as
Citizen of Noviomagus
et cetera



LONDON

Henry Newton Stevens 115 St Martins Lane over
Against the Church of St Martin in the Fields
Christmas MDCCCLXXXIV

YHH (2)



A single erratum may knock out the brains
of a whole passage. *Cowper*



TO THE MEMORY OF TWO OLD
FRIENDS
CHARLES WHITTINGHAM
&
WILLIAM PICKERING
Printer and Publisher
Whose beautiful Books are their
EPITAPHS
And whose Epitaphs embalm their
Memories
This unworthy Achievement is
Inscribed



This paper was read before the
LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
at Cambridge in October 1882



From my Study at No 4
Trafalgar Square London WC



WHO SPOILS OUR NEW ENGLISH BOOKS



THE MANUFACTURE of a beautiful and durable book costs little if anything more, it is believed, than it does to manufacture a clumsy and unsightly one. Good taste, skill and severe training are as requisite and necessary in

the proper production of books as in any other of the fine arts. The well-recognized 'lines of beauty' are, in our judgment, as essential and well defined in the one case as in the other.

Books are both our luxuries and our daily bread. They have become to our lives and happiness prime necessities. They are our trusted favourites, our guardians, our confidential advisers, and the safe consumers of our leisure. They cheer us in poverty, and comfort us in the misery of affluence. They absorb the effervescence of impetuous youth, and while away the tedium of age. You may not teach ignorance to a youth who carries a favourite book in his pocket ; and to a man who masters his appetites a good book is a talisman which insures him against the dangers of overspeed, idleness, and shallowness.

Why then let our books, like some of

our manufactures, run to false cheapness and to shoddy? and Who are their Shoddimites? are our questions to-day. The disagreeable fact that our books are deteriorating in quality is assumed for the present and taken for granted. The fault exists and is daily becoming more and more manifest. We do not just now charge much dishonesty to any particular party, but content ourselves with naming the adulteration, and hinting that in all probability the fault lies somewhere between the uncritical consumer and the untrained manufacturer. Let both parties and their intermediates or coadjutors look to their laurels.

Of course our inquiries lead us not to speak of the authorship or literary qualities of our present books, but only of their outward appearance, material, and manufacture. A handsome book and a new English book were once synonymous

terms. Indeed it used to be conceded, the world over, that the highest type of a new book was English. England on level terms could once well afford to stand comparison in book-making with any other country. Can she do so now? As national enterprise or special business, it seems to us that the production of really fine books adapted to the honest requirements of the public, is in practice slowly but surely becoming one of England's lost fine arts. Even high-class commercial printing by steam and otherwise, it seems to us, is falling below the good old English standard, judging by the average results that we have here lying before us, books old and new, English and foreign.

We are not unmindful of the masterly efforts of certain recent printers to retrieve this decadence by throwing on to the already over-burdened trade several big, heavy, and voluminous works of standard

authors termed 'éditions de luxe.' So far the intelligent consumer in this small island has successfully resisted the infliction. It is not unlikely that this enterprise may be counted as another downward step in the noble art of book-making in this country. Many sets of these ponderous books have been transported to America, but some of them are already quietly finding their way back, being ill-suited to the wants and taste of that practical people.

These statements and opinions, however radical and unexpected, are not the wild effusions of the writer, cropping up on the spur of the moment for this interesting occasion, but are based partly on long personal observations, and partly on the discussions (in some of which he participated) and reports of the juries of the several great International Exhibitions since 1851, especially the last three held

at Vienna, Philadelphia, and Paris, 1874—1878, where and when the best and latest books of all nations were exhibited, carefully compared, and their merits fully and impartially discussed. It is probably no breach of confidence as a juror at Paris in 1878, to say, at this distance of time, that almost every juror felt and expressed his disappointment at the comparative quality of the English exhibit in this class. Two gold medals, however, found their way across the Channel, but it need not be explained how far courtesy and merit got mixed in this international transaction.

Let us therefore repeat by way of some qualification our conviction that this noble art of bookmaking in Great Britain, if not positively falling below its former merits, is lagging in the race of progress, especially when contrasted with that progress exhibited by some other nations: a circumstance anything but complimentary to

‘the art preservative of all arts’ as practised to-day in progressive England.

These remarks are not intended (as we have already stated) to apply to any literary merits that lurk in our new books, but only to their get-up, their material, their form and proportion, their taste and style. In other words, what is meant and asserted, is that the present new English, Scotch, and Irish books, of a given size and price, are not of the average quality of high art and skill in manufacture that is found in some other countries. We are speaking of books, and do not include the important class of rapid commercial printing termed newspapers. These we gladly except, for they are acknowledged to be superior to those of any other country.

Our printing presses are teeming and steaming with books of all sorts (with some striking exceptions) not up to the

mark of the high calling of book-making. It is no excuse to say that the rapidity of production has been largely increased. That amounts merely to confessing that we are now consuming two bad books in the place of one good one. Nor do we admit for one moment as a legitimate excuse the oft-repeated cry of the printers that, in the active competition for cheapness, they are ground down by the public or the publishers to the tally-point of chicory and shoddy. This amounts only to an open confession of scamping, adulteration, and inferior workmanship. It is not the amiable public that is so hungry for cheap printing and cheap books; but the greedy provider of cheap and cheaper books with which the public is crammed like Strasburg geese, that are in fault. This downward tendency is not so much the fault of the consumers as the manufacturers. There are many exceptions to

these sweeping remarks ; and we are prepared to have our premises disputed all round, by both interested and disinterested parties, even in a bookish assembly like this, but we trust that we shall not be driven, in self-defence, to plead the Campanellan rule that, sometimes

Books either miss or hit
By scale of critic's wit.

That is, in some cases, the critic may not be up to the mark, while the book is. In the uncertainty of what may be the true standard of merit in the manufacture of a given book, no doubt cases may and do arise in which the non-appreciation or condemnation of a new book in its form, quality, and proportions, may be rather the fault of the critic than of the book. But we will try and avoid such cases.

Now with this preliminary flourish let us inquire in a pointed and business-like manner,—Who spoils our new English

books? It is manifest that there are no less than ten parties directly interested in this question, and that one, several, or all of them may justly be accused if not convicted as participants in the decadence of book-making in England.

They are,

- 1 The Author,
- 2 The Publisher,
- 3 The Printer,
- 4 The Reader,
- 5 The Compositor,
- 6 The Pressman or Machinist,
- 7 The Paper-maker,
- 8 The Ink-maker,
- 9 The Book-binder, and
- 10 The last not least, the Consumer,
often ignorant and careless of
the beauty and proportions of
his books—a great sinner!

Now of all these ten sinners by omission or commission it is no business of ours to

point out who is the greatest or the least. Any one of them can spoil a good book in spite of the combined efforts and merits of the other nine. But when two or three unite in their ignorance and mechanical blindness, nothing but accident can save the book.

There is, however, no question of honesty or dishonesty in the matter. All and every one of the ten co-labourers are willingly credited with good intentions, but there is somehow at the present day a painful lack of harmony apparent in the results, the bungling work of one of them, or the clumsy manipulation of another, often defeating the combined excellence of all the rest. Indeed, no book can be perfect in its manufacture unless every stage of it be guarded by sanctified common sense.

Our new books at their present prices are not what they should be. Is it not time therefore for Librarians, whose busi-

ness is dissemination, and whose occupation is 'books,' to set their Association thinking of the subject? The cure is not to be effected in a giffin. The matter must be looked into and fought out until there be established 'A School of Typography' in England, in which every disciple of these ten tribes shall study a recognized grammar of book-manufacture, including printing, as standard as Lindley Murray's, Noah Webster's, or the British Museum ninety-one Rules for Cataloguing. Let every one of the ten learn his rules and play well his part, and then the art of bookmaking will drift back into the practice of those same laws of proportion, taste, and workmanship so well settled and displayed in old manuscripts and old books, large and small, long before and long subsequent to the birth of typography.

It is as difficult to teach without example the philosophy of art and of mechanics, as

of history. It is proposed therefore to summon each one of our ten occasional defaulters separately, and endeavour by example of these sixty books on the table before us, to illustrate what is meant and how our meaning is applied, assigning to each one some of the particular offences alleged against him during the progress of producing a book he has helped to spoil. And first

THE AUTHOR, who is generally better acquainted with the subject of his book than the object to be properly manufactured and set before a dainty public, especially if he be new to the mystery of bookmaking, has often and in many cases extremely crude ideas of form, comeliness, and style. If he persists, as he often does, in his notions, against the better judgment, experience, and skill of his publisher and his printer, he is pretty sure to spoil his book. Author's notions of the printer's require-

ments of 'copy'; of the division of the work into chapters and paragraphs; of spelling, capitalizing, interpunction, and even grammar; of the headings of chapters, of headlines, leading, spacing, and above all the shape, proportion, margins, and position of the printed pages; of the type, the paper, and the ink; of the prefaces, the tables of contents, the printer's ornaments, the indexes, et cetera, are sometimes erroneous, and often lead him astray. If he be not educated in every one of these particulars, or if he do not leave them to experts, or consult with them, he may mar his plot. These are arts outside of authorship, but not inconsistent with it. The author should be a modest man, and leave these technical details in skilled hands, at the same time watching vigilantly that no one of the other nine shall by ignorance or carelessness obscure his meaning or mar the beauty of

his work. Yet how many authors dogmatize in these their foibles, and so having their own way spoil their own books for themselves and the public.

2 THE PUBLISHER is the person who ought to shoulder most of the shortcomings of the author, and combat his offensive proclivities and crude notions ; but too often he is a mere dealer without responsibility or knowledge, handing over his charge to that printer who will do the work the cheapest. There are many fussy publishers whose intermediary office between the author and the printer consists in angling for the manuscripts and handing them over to the competing printer who will do the whole work at the least cost in his own and the cheapest way. There are many honourable exceptions, but in our day in England, it must be confessed that there is a dearth of such scholarly and painstaking printers and publishers as Nicolas Janson,

Aldus Romanus, Henry Quentel, Anthony Koburger, Henry and Robert Stephens, Christopher Froschover, the Plantins, Hans Lufft, the Elzevirs, the Didots, Bodoni, Ibarra, Baskerville, Charles Whittingham, William Pickering, etc. all of whose books, cheap and dear, were constructed on the lines of truth and beauty, and are to-day acquired and preserved as things 'fair to see.' An ignorant, unskilled, pedantic, shiftless and enterprising publisher, building where he has no foundation (he is not an unknown quantity, but rather an encroaching one) is a nuisance to be abated. He is one of the chief men who shoddy our literature. He largely panders to that public voracity which demands cheap books even if they are lowered in quality and taste. We have no objections to cheap books, but they need not be unsightly too. The cheapest and commonest flower of the hedge maintains its pristine beauty and

form, just as the cheapest book ought to be made to do.

3 THE PRINTER of the present day has become a scapegoat, or a patient beast of burden. The faults of the author and the publisher are generally attributed to him, especially if the book when issued proves to be a failure in any point of its manufacture. The author's fads and the publisher's notions are often conveyed as instructions to the printer. He knows them to be injurious, but must obey. Hence many books are spoilt in spite of the printer, while he alone receives the blame.

But the printer himself has, or may have, his own faults, and plenty of them. He generally has no recognized foundation on which to build. The competition is so great that he often snatches at anything, often receives the beginning of the copy without knowing where it will end, or what the real character and extent of the work

is to be. The size and quality of the paper, the shape of the printed page, the number of lines, the size of the type, the form and comeliness of the title-pages, and the many little niceties of the work are not thought-out and digested as they ought to be, before the copy goes into the hands of the reader or compositor. The entire work is often from the time it enters the printing office allowed to drift through its several stages of manufacture without due and previous consideration. It was not so with our good old friends William Pickering and Charles Whittingham, publisher and printer, working for many years harmoniously together. It was their custom, as both used repeatedly to tell us, to each first sit upon every new book, and painfully hammer out in his own mind its ideal form and proportions. Then two Sundays at least were required to compare notes in the little summer-house in Mr Whitting-

ham's garden at Chiswick, or in the after-dinner sanctuary, to settle the shape and dress of their forthcoming 'friend of man.' It was amusing as well as instructive to see each of them, when they met, pull from his bulging side-pocket well-worn title-pages and sample-leaves for discussion and consideration. When they agreed, perfection was at hand, and the 'copy' went forward to the compositors, but not till then. The results, to this day, are seen in all the books bearing the imprint of William Pickering, nearly all of which bear also evidence that they came from the 'Chiswick Press.' Of course there are many exceptions, but the want of standard rules for governing our publishers and printers, as well as for shaping and completing books is greatly to be deplored. The master printer requires a school of typography as much as the men he employs.

But another great impediment to high-class bookmaking is the different methods in different printing houses. In some positive and written instructions are given out to the readers, who are to see that the compositors comply, but these are often so crude that the book falls short in many essential particulars. This is repeatedly found out in the early stage of manufacture, but the cost of altering the form or page, or adapting both to the paper, which is too often an after consideration, is so great that the monstrous inception is suffered to mature in vulgarity.

4 THE READER under the printer is the real man of responsibility. He receives his instructions based on the traditions of the particular printing office to which he is attached, supplemented, or perhaps, counteracted by those of the author, editor, or publisher, and has to turn out a perfect book in the face of all these restraints.

But he, like his predecessors in the undertaking, is often hampered by the same want of plan and due knowledge of the extent and proportions of the work that have defeated them. He neither knows the beginning nor the end of his undertaking, and often for the want of a proper method the book is composed and made up without his knowing either the size of the paper, or what particular shape the work is to be born in. He must watch the compositor's work, until the book has gone on to the press ; but even then he may be defeated in spite of all his skill ; for there is no good and sufficient manual by which the work is to be guided till the end. Let him also go to a school of typography, and let the readers of one office agree with those of other offices. The want of harmony in the work of readers is much to be regretted.

5 THE COMPOSITOR is a little person of great consequence. His direct responsi-

bility morally is not so great as that of the reader, but too much is often thrust upon him. He receives in too many cases the copy illegible without its having either been pointed, corrected, or fitted for him, and having put it into type, sends it to the reader with all the faults of the author and himself. The reader is lenient, and so the author has more work to do than he cares to pay for or ought to be served with. The real maker of the book, in many cases, is the compositor. If he is lucky the book may come out right, but often nothing but chance or accident protects him. He is guided by certain trade or companion rules, but they are too meagre, and often worse than nothing. He ought to have a chance at the school of typography, and be better instructed in his own business, and be taught not to assume the business of any other sinner joined with him in the manufacture of books. His remuneration being for

quantity his zeal in that direction often disgraces him, and tempts him into over and irregular spacings, over runnings, short lines, over pointing, and other unworkman-like irregularities. It is true that the readers ought not to pass these defects, but the defects are allowed to remain as the remedy would entail delay.

6 THE PRESSMAN or MACHINIST has many opportunities of spoiling books. The lightning speed of steam and the tediousness of the old hand-press are no doubt partly in fault, but ignorance is the main cause of disaster. The books on the table before us are, some of them, lamentable examples of this class of delinquents. You can discover a want of uniformity in the quantity of ink over the various pages, and the paper not being laid on the forme to a perfect line the pages more or less when bound appear crooked.

But between the compositor and the press-

man there is a long road in which many a book is spoiled. Who is responsible in every case it is hard to tell. This however is manifest: if one orders now ten new books from the Row, nine of them will come limping in, all misshaped in some particular or another. Their make up is discreditable; the page is not in proportion to the margins and the margins correspond not unto the size of the paper. The leading is defective or the headlines are ill placed. Almost anyone knows a pretty book when he sees it, but what constitute the essentials of form and proportion few have any idea. Were one to assert that the length of a printed page should have relation to its width, and that the top should not exceed half the bottom margin, and that the front should be double the back margin, he might not be far from the 'lines of beauty,' yet half the printers, publishers, and authors would cry out that the pages are driven up

into a corner. Nevertheless, such are very nearly the proportions and shape of our old standards, large and small, in manuscript and print, that have stood the test of criticism and of time.

7 THE PAPER-MAKER is responsible for the defects of many of our books, as we see by the examples before us. Shoddied paper is as common as the people who use it. Cheapness has succeeded to quality, and as long as our people know no better the paper-maker and the publisher will cram them. The remedy lies only in the consumer. Dishonest manufacture, if demanded, will be supplied. Glue and paste will take the place of fibre so long as they will sell and a patient public buy. Shoddy, glue, date-coffee, chicory, and butterine will meet us at every turn so long as an indiscriminating public encourages their production. Good and durable paper can be had if demanded.

8 THE INK-MAKER is a sinner of the first magnitude. The first printing inks ever used, as early as about the middle of the fifteenth century, are still bright, clear, and beautiful. The first printed Bible, the first Psalter, and the first Classics are all to this day conspicuous for the beauty and permanency of their inks. Compare them with almost any inks now produced and you will readily see what a falling off there has been. Shoddy, cheapness, and adulteration are the three words that express the results. Good inks can be made even now and at moderate prices, but ink-making by practice has become almost one of the lost arts. Even in the Exhibition of 1851 no medals for printer's ink were given, but it was said by the jury that some of them exhibited appeared brilliant and firm, almost as much so as the first inks of four hundred years ago, but would they stand the test of time? Good, bright,

black, brilliant inks that adhere to the paper and will not spread or turn brown, can no doubt still be had, but they will require hundreds of years to test their qualities of permanence in comparison with the first inks. The sallow inks of our day, a larger proportion of them, are as offensive to the sight as they are to the smell, as some of the recent books before us amply testify.

9 THE BOOK-BINDER spoils probably as large a proportion of our books as any other one of our ten sinners. He professes to bind according to his pay. But he has all he cuts off, and he sometimes probably cuts deep with a motive. Leastwise, one large binder in New York, as frank and truthful as enterprising, confessed to us that he 'calculated' on his shavings paying his rent. At all events, as we receive our new books fresh from the binder, we naturally ask in these trimming days, when the

labour of the paper knife has almost ceased, what has become of our margins? The binder replies that the printer left the edges so irregular that he has had to take 'just a shaving off,' so as not to offend the eye. That 'shaving' is just the rub. Many a book, now unsightly, would have been presentable, if properly shaved, or not shaved at all. The boards are frequently scamped, and then the book is not unfrequently cut down to the boards. To save time and labour all the cutting is generally taken off the bottom margin, so that the top margin considerably exceeds it, leaving the book unsightly and misshapen. If books are to be trimmed at all, let their margins be trimmed in due proportion. Sometimes it is necessary from bad printing to trim the margins, the printer generally blaming the paper for not being made or cut square. A little care, intelligence, forethought, and in-

struction will generally cure this defect in the printer, and if one then stands with a lash over the binder, the book that has by good luck come to him in a satisfactory manner, may not be spoiled by this last man. All things are possible, and our authors, publishers, and printers should combine to prevent their books being spoiled in these last hands.

10 THE CONSUMER, ignorant and careless of the beauty and proportions of his books, is the greatest sinner of all ! If the generous Public will look to their own interests, pleasures, and delights in knowledge, they will look more sharply to their Books, their truest friends. Their degeneration should be tolerated no longer. Let them be cheap, but at the same time let us no longer tolerate the adulteration and bad taste that is now more and more thrust upon us. Drum all these ten sinners together and insist on each one performing well his part.

It is not unlikely that we have named faults that are not perhaps applied to the real sinner, but that is not of much consequence. Many of our new books are unnecessarily spoiled, and it matters little whether this or that fault be laid to this or that sinner. The publisher, the printer, or the binder may sometimes, nay, often does, if he can, shift the burden of his sins to the shoulders of his neighbour, but all the faults finally will come back on the consumer if he tolerates this adulteration longer.



BIBLIOGRAPHY



CHISWICK PRESS: CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND CO
TOOKS COURT, CHANCERY LANE, LONDON
CHRISTMAS 1884





