

Review Articles

Pleasures and Practices

Invitation to Book Collecting; Its Pleasures and Practices with Kindred Discussions of Manuscripts, Maps, and Prints. By Colton Storm and Howard Peckham. New York, R. R. Bowker Company, 1947.

It has been six hundred years since Richard le Bury first extolled the pleasures of books and book-collecting. The pleasures have hardly changed appreciably, although the material for collecting has multiplied tremendously. The reasons for submitting to the various kinds of pleasures the pursuit of the rare or scarce affords, have been described again and again in every century and in nearly every language. The English heritage is as rich as any, as such foreign writers as Gabriel Naudé and Octave Uzanne have readily found translators. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the passion, which came to be called bibliomania, was most graphically described by the letter writers and essayists. The letters of Thomas Gray, Horace Walpole, and many another traveler are liberally seasoned with accounts of their frequent "discoveries" at home and abroad. The essays of Charles Lamb, Andrew Lang, and Augustine Birrell are frequently based on the feel, the smell, the sight of leather bindings. Professional bibliophiles became honored in the succeeding volumes of Thomas Frognall Dibdin and F. Somner Merryweather.

Today the game is still being described, as well as played, and there are few confirmed collectors who begrudge a shelf to such contemporary guides and friends as A. Edward Newton, Edmund Lester Pearson, Percy Muir, Holbrook Jackson, George Goodspeed, and A. S. W. Rosenbach. In fact, the literature has grown so large that Jackson has been able to compile two delightful anthologies of quotations on the subject, *The Anatomy of Bibliomania* in two volumes and *The Fear of Books* in one. This quantity of expert advice might make one ask why another volume is needed or even tolerated. The answer is simple. No enthusiast ever has enough of his hobby, even if it be at second hand. Further-

more, anecdotes arise with every auction season and the old ones never lose their appeal to a new audience. Today this country is full of new collectors—more than ever before, because a whole new class has recently come into real money, and no one enjoys a pretty binding more than a *nouveau riche*, unless it be his wife. The volume under consideration is directed quite largely to new collectors, particularly to those who feel it is only a rich man's game. That there are pleasures here for every purse is proved many times and I can think of no better volume to place in the hands of a college freshman, or his mental equal, who earnestly asks, "Why collect books?"

This is one of the very best books on the pleasures of book collecting. Personally I still prefer the smaller, cheaper little hand-book issued Christmas before last by Percy Muir, called *Book-Collecting as a Hobby*. But that, I should say, is a bit further advanced—not for the beginner but rather for the junior or senior who has progressed to the question, "How do I become a discriminating collector?"

This volume is based on a series of lectures given at the University of Michigan, partly to explain the William L. Clements Library, "but chiefly to preach the fun we find in collecting books, manuscripts, maps and prints." The book is especially fortunate in the combined wisdom and enthusiasms of its two authors. Howard Peckham, after an apprenticeship as chief editorial writer for the *Grand Rapids Press*, joined the Clements Library as curator of manuscripts. He is now director of the Indiana Historical Bureau and secretary of the Indiana Historical Society. Colton Storm began as a cataloger in the leading book auction houses of Chicago and New York and, after what his friends identify as the "Retz and Drang" period in his own bookshop, became a member of the staff of the Clements Library, where he is now curator of maps and manuscripts. It is his knowledge of the "practices" of book collecting that has made this book invaluable

to all librarians and amateur collectors who are frequently puzzled by that modern middleman, the "dealer."

It is the emphasis on the practices of book collecting that seems to me to give this book not only its chief interest but also its novelty in the field of otherwise similar books. Who before has put down on paper the motives which guide a dealer in pricing a volume? Who else has told where dealers find their stock and make their profits? Who but a reformed dealer could so clearly and so inclusively describe the dealers' procedures and his guesses right or wrong? We are still waiting for the ripe and learned memoirs of a Lathrop Harper and the "now it can be told" of Charlie Eberstadt, but this is far nearer the bookman's daily fare than the thrilling "kills" in the *Saturday Evening Post* of Dr. Rosenbach. Here at last is an honest attempt, well-considered and well-executed, to give the dealer his due. His are the brains behind most famous collections and his is the pleasant life with plenty of ups and downs. I refer the interested collector or librarian to an impassioned *apologia* for dealers in rare books on pages 190-93.

I should like also to single out a passage further on where a reasoned attack is made

on a recent development in sales by auction where purchasers are invited to bid by mail. I agree that this procedure is quite unjustified as it places the auctioneer in the very unfavorable position of trying to do his best by the consignor and the bidder. It usually results in the bidder getting charged his total bid.

One point needs fuller emphasis than is accorded it in this volume and that is the tendency of prices to rise immediately upon the publication of a definitive bibliography. We have all noticed the rise in prices of volumes included in the original *Short Title Catalogue* and, more recently, the soaring prices for American fiction before 1851, following the publication of Lyle Wright's bibliography. It seems only a matter of a few years before the author's *Seventeenth-Century Books Priced at One Dollar or Two Are Common* will be nostalgically remembered.

It is obviously the pleasant duty of all collectors and librarians to read all the books there are on book-collecting. It will be one of the great pleasures of the season to discover this general handbook, partly for the pleasures, but especially for the practices of this art.—*Donald Wing.*

Two More Surveys

A Report on the Mary Reed Library. By Louis R. Wilson. Denver, University of Denver, 1947. 18p.

"The New York State Library: Report of a Survey." By Keyes D. Metcalf and Andrew D. Osborn. Cambridge, Mass., 1947. 46p. (Mimeographed)

Some reviewers of recent surveys have raised questions as to both the value and the technique of surveys, with the intimation that surveys are probably not as valuable as we like to believe and that the method is faulty. If we assume that both of these observations were true up to a point, this reviewer, who has been a surveyor himself, would still believe that surveys have their place in directing library development. Testimony to this fact may be found in Louis R. Wilson's analysis of the results of some university surveys in his article in the July 1947 issue of *College and Research Libraries*, Part II, 368-75.

There is nothing strikingly unusual in either of the two surveys under review. Dr. Wilson's study of the Denver situation is straightforward and concise and considers such matters as library resources; functions of the library committee, the library staff, and the educational program; preparation of the budget; budgetary allocations; library personnel; development of library collections; building requirements; audio-visual facilities; publications exchange program; library accessions list; and "Friends of the Library." The report, as Dr. Wilson points out, "is not intended to present in detail all the matters covered in the survey." Major observations are pointed out and measures are suggested for improving the service of the library. In a brief introduction President Caleb F. Gates calls attention to these recommendations and suggestions and notes that they "offer a challenge to each one of us concerned with