The Care and Repair
OF
BOOKS

BY

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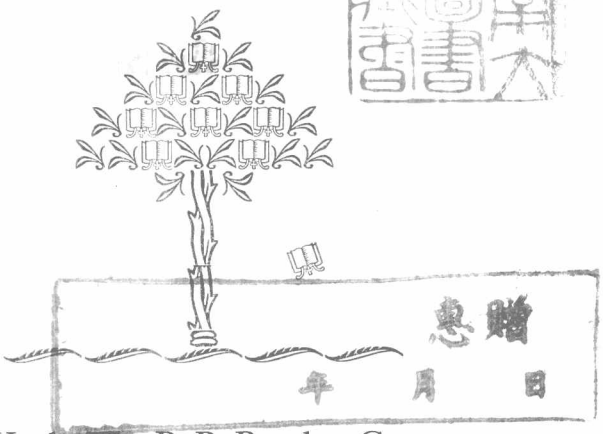

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CHAPTER I

The Care of Books in General

BOOKS are like children in more ways than one; in their response to care and attention in early life, for one thing, and in their response to heredity and environment, for another. It was the "Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table," was it not, whose first specification for his "man of family" demanded "four or five generations of gentlemen and gentlewomen"? For our "book of family" the same four or five generations of gentle forebears are equally necessary. The book's early life will be happier, its maturity longer, its final disappearance more distant if, like the child, it has found its lines cast among kindly and sympathetic friends and parents. Hygienic living conditions, proper prophylaxis, prevention of disease, are for both more important than medication or drugs. Thoughtful and skillful attention by competent, well-trained, experienced physicians and surgeons is necessary for both.

The child has better assurance of long and useful life if he has been properly clad, has received proper food and attention, has found his lot among people who will care for him and free him from unfair demands on his strength. The book has better assurance of long and useful life if it was brought into the world on paper of lasting quality, paper fitted to the needs the volume must serve, the demands it must

meet. It will have better assurance of long and useful life if it is clad in protecting garments selected with judgment, cut and fitted with skill, certain of proper food at proper times in proper amounts, brought to appreciative hands as soon as indications of weakness begin to show themselves, treated with proper care and attention when major operations are called for, and housed under conditions most beneficial for such companions, helpmates, friends.

For most of us the book is more like an adopted child than one of our own flesh and blood, since it usually reaches us full grown and mature. Our control over its youth and adolescence is usually slight. Happy the man permitted to stand by and help give shape and form to the child of his brain, to select type and paper, to choose boards and cover stock and end papers, to decide color and weight of cloth or leather, to sketch the lettering and decorations in this form or that.

With most of us the book must be housed under conditions over which we have less control than over many other more material things that enter into our daily lives. Our books are kept in buildings as warm or as cool during the heating season as our wishes or financial means permit. But during the summer the rooms are hot or cool, dry or damp, suffer harm or rejoice in favoring conditions that depend usually on the weather and are happily independent of our control. We all know they should not be too hot or too

cold, too humid or too dry, but few of us are fortunate enough to be able to control these factors.

Air conditioning. "Air conditioning" is nowadays on all our lips. It usually means that air is cooled in summer or hot weather. We take for granted it will be heated when it's too cold for comfort. Now and then we find "conditioning" applied to temperature, humidity, purity of the air, almost so rarely as to call for comment or query.

Sometimes a factory or industrial plant needs control of temperature, humidity, purity for benefit of the material it works with. When work stops "conditioning" stops. When you find a place where all controls are on all the time, day in and day out, you are sure to remember it.

The ideal for books is a temperature of 65 to 70 degrees, humidity between 50 and 65 per cent, complete washing and filtering to remove noxious gases at all temperatures and all humidities, and this control exercised all the time.

Just how books are affected when the air is "conditioned" (primarily for human comfort) during working hours and left to the tender mercies of Dame Nature for the rest of the day seems not to have been studied scientifically. Is this variation of temperature good for them or harmful? Is it better to let nature take its course or to try to control even for a dozen hours a day? Some day we shall probably

know. At present we can but observe, watch, guess, speculate.

Sunshine helps free our books from various enemies, but sunshine will soon deaden many modern papers and fade many modern colors in cloth or leather. Darkness protects from harmful effects or direct light, but darkness encourages molds and insect pests. With books or children or most other things the old Greek advice against "nothing too much" is as sound today as when first uttered.

In the following pages an attempt is made to tell about some of the harmful influences that shorten the life of books, to suggest some remedies for cases that appeal for help, to plead for some of the care and attention for these mute but eloquent children of our brains that is given to the children of our loins, to mitigate, if not remove entirely, the iniquities of the fathers visited upon books.

Various suggestions are here set down for the care and repair of books, manuscripts, broadsides, pamphlets, and other forms of the printed or written message. They have been developed from the actual handling of books and caring for books, are set down from experience rather than culled uncritically from other books. No doubt other good methods are mentioned in books or are known as tradition in the guild of bookbinders. The mere fact of omission here is certainly no reason why they should not be tried; occasionally one workman is able to succeed with ma-

terials and methods that spell failure for his brother at the bench beside him. The real test comes with repeated trials and consistent success.

It is only fair to point out that the methods of treatment here set forth are primarily applicable to conditions prevailing in the temperate zone of this western world, and probably would require adjustment to colder or hotter, drier or more humid countries. Principles of treatment would remain the same; the only changes required would be in details of methods employed to overcome adverse conditions.

CHAPTER II

The Care of Books in the Library

LET us suppose you have your books safely delivered new and fresh for current publications, in "good second-hand condition" for the older works, all well printed in a good face of type impressed on good paper, all protected by boards properly sewed in and properly covered with first-class cloth or well-tanned leather, all the work of competent artisans anxious to show the skill of their hands—a set of assumptions probably contrary to fact in most cases, but well enough to start with as a preliminary survey.

Opening the book. First comes opening the book. Well, opening books is nothing more than opening books, is it not? Nay, not so. Much harm has been hopelessly done to innocent volumes by careless or thoughtless or ignorant or indifferent handling when opening them. Your reader who really cares for books will put the volume on a table, the back down and the fore edges up, will open the front cover, then the back, will open a few pages next from the back and the front alternately, pressing firmly but gently along the inner margins of the pages, thus lessening the danger of breaking the binding between the sections. If the book has been bound properly all this care may perhaps not be necessary. But the danger

is that careless or improper binding may be so covered up that harm is done before it is discovered. Whether well bound or poorly bound there is not the slightest doubt as to the gratitude for careful and appreciative opening felt by the spirit treasured up within those covers.

Collating. After the book is opened comes collating, not so portentous or imposing a task as the phrase may perhaps suggest. It means merely the making certain that the volume is complete and perfect, usually entailing nothing more than running through the pages one by one to see that all are there and to catch omissions and imperfections. If maps or plates are listed outside the pagination they must be checked for completeness and for proper placing. In early printed books careful checking of signatures and catchwords may be necessary. This is also the time to see if the cover is damaged, if the corners are bent or broken or battered, if the lining is loose. New books go back to dealer or publisher if not satisfactory; with old ones decision as to return or repair will depend on circumstances.

Catalogue, accession, ownership records. Recording and accessioning and cataloguing offer the next hazard. In some private libraries these processes take place in the brain of the owner; in larger collections they become more complicated and more harmful. Some indication should certainly be made as to date of receipt, source, cost, and these notes can usually

be added inoffensively and inconspicuously but securely. Some owners content themselves with a pencil note on a flyleaf or other blank page, on a margin of a leaf, on a bookplate, others religiously refusing to mark their books in any way and recording the necessary information on the catalogue card, shelf list, or some other similar document. It is a matter for the individual to settle, no council or supreme court having thus far been invested with authority to speak for all of us at all times in all places so far as books are concerned.

A few libraries have bookplates and book traditions that add distinction to any volume once on their shelves. With most, however, it is safe to say that the less the marking the less the danger of harming.

To be sure, if absence of marking increases the danger of theft the decision is simple. Some owners use a code in referring to source and price, adopt a cryptic method of marking ownership by notation on certain pages, and thus lessen the danger of harm to the volume.

The owner undoubtedly has the legal right to add his signature to title page or flyleaf; approval or objection will depend on the point of view of the person making comment.

As to use of bookplate or stamp it scarcely seems too much to ask that a man seat himself before his books and make sure that a plate or a stamp is really necessary. If so, then next, will this do its duty and

avoid harm even if it doesn't add to the charm of the book?

Advice as to choice of a bookplate is almost as dangerous and useless, quite as futile and fruitless, as counsel to Coelebs in search of a wife. The bookplate, we feel, should be attractive, preferably small and good to look on, befittingly modest and characteristically individualistic, costly but not expressed in fancy, rich but not gaudy, useful as asserting ownership, properly instructive as to previous experience. The owner must eventually accept praise or blame. The onus is his.

Once chosen, the bookplate usually goes on the inside of the front cover, properly demands attention to plates already there, may also ask for a moment's thought about other plates that perhaps may follow.

Stamps. Perforating stamps or rubber stamps are occasionally used, more often in public collections than private. Little defence can be offered except the obvious hope or belief that the book with them is spared a more distressing fate than the one without. At rare intervals there is occasionally found a stamp of size and appearance able to prove they are not necessarily all ugly or forbidding, but it means examination of many to find the infrequent attractive one.

The stamp should be placed with reference to layout and design of the page it is to fall on. No reason why it can not harmonize with its neighbors rather

than be slung at them helterskelter by ignorant or indifferent hands.

Life on the shelves. When once these preliminary records have been finished comes the next hazard in shape of the life of the book on the shelves. The shelves should normally be filled, or they should have enough book supports to keep the volumes standing upright. If they are too full it means rubbing and harmful friction, inevitable wear on top of the back when books are pulled down; if not full enough the books will lean to one side or the other, and the bindings will be harmed.

This seems so slight a matter as frequently to be overlooked, but there are no more insidious or harmful enemies of books than the practice of letting them sag on the shelves. If there are any pamphlets or paper bound volumes among the lot their life is certainly neither long nor merry unless they are properly supported.

Of course we today are far advanced in care of books as compared with our fathers and grandfathers. We worship classification, bring together books about the same topic, arrange them alphabetically according to the writer, are happy and content if they are "classified," even if that classification tries to make tall soldiers march in close order with short ones.

A tall book standing alongside a shorter one runs grave danger that its sides will warp and lose shape