

HENRY SPENCER ASHBEE

A DINNER OF

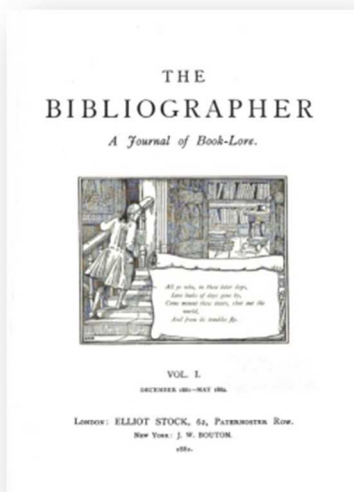
FRENCH BIBLIOPHILES



Henry Spencer Ashbee

SCISSORS & PASTE BIBLIOGRAPHIES
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This short piece was originally published in the *The Bibliographer: A Journal of Book-Lore*, May 1882, pp. 169-71. This was my copy-text, and the front wrapper of the periodical is reproduced below. The piece was reprinted, May 1882, presumably by the author for distribution to his friends. The British Library pressmark for the reprint is: 820.f.44.(9.) – P.J.K.



A DINNER OF FRENCH BIBLIOPHILES

“When I would know thee, Goodyere, my thought looks
Upon thy well-made choice of friends and books;
Then do I love thee, and behold thy ends
In making thy friends books, and thy books friends.”

BEN JONSON

WERE a comparison to be made between the learned societies and book-clubs of England and France, it would probably be

found that the former affect chiefly science, archaeology, and history, while the latter are more generally devoted to literature and art—that while our meetings are of a business-like, utilitarian kind, theirs are animated by sociability and enlivened by conviviality. Indeed, our neighbours *d’outrre manche* have always been famous for their jovial assemblies, cheered by the glass, and not unfrequently made gay by song.¹ Although they would afford material for a pleasing article, it is not my intention to attempt here an account of French convivial societies, but to confine myself to a brief sketch of one of their literary clubs to which I have the privilege of belonging.

About five and a half centuries ago Richard de Bury wrote: “Oh God of gods of Zion! What a rushing river of joy gladdens my heart as often as I have a chance of going to Paris! There the days seem always short, there are the goodly collections on the delicate fragrant bookshelves.” Paris of to-day is as attractive to the lover of books as it was when the above passage was penned. The choice collections remain on the delicate shelves—gems of typography, adorned by the happiest efforts of burin and needle, and clothed in bindings, themselves works of art, abound in the select libraries formed by the most fastidious of collectors. The heart of every bibliophile must palpitate as did that of the author of *Philobiblon*, when he has an opportunity of revelling among these treasures, especially should it be his good fortune to “assist” at meetings such as the one I am about to describe.

The *Amis des Livres* resemble our *Philobiblon Society* and *Rabelais Club*, in so far that they cement their union by social gatherings, dining together on the first Tuesday of every month, to talk over the doings of the Society and to canvass its future

¹ A complete dictionary of these societies was compiled by M. Arthur Dinaux, and was edited and published by M. Gustave Brunet : *Les Sociétés Badines, Bachiques, Littéraires et Chantantes, Paris, Bachelin-Defiorene, 1867, 2 vols. 8vo.*

prospects and undertakings; to converse about their own treasures, and to communicate to each other their bouquinistic trouvailles of the month, for, as Charles Nodier remarks: “*Après le plaisir de posséder des livres, il n’y en a guère de plus doux que celui d’un parler, et de communiquer au public [or to one’s friends] ces innocentes richesses de la pensée qu’on acquiert dans la culture des lettres.*” Their object, however, is neither the publication of old and rare documents, nor the production of original *jeux d’esprit*, but rather the application of modern art to already published works of the imagination of recognised popularity.

On the 7th of March we met at Durand’s restaurant, and by half-past seven in the evening were gathered round the festive board. I must own that neither the room nor the table sufficed to afford accommodation for the six-and-twenty members assembled; but conviviality was certainly not checked by our excessive proximity, for friendly repartee, pleasant conversation, and amusing anecdotes flowed without intermission “*ab ovo usque ad mala.*”

The chair was occupied by the Due d’Aumale, whose long residence among us is pleasingly remembered, and whose departure from Orleans House was regretted by every Englishman; beside him sat the president of the Society, M. Eugène Paillet, as well known for the amiability of his character as for his exquisite taste and discrimination in the art of the last century, worthy son of a worthy father, whose biography he has lately written;² immediately on my right was the *archiviste-trésorier*, M. Alfred Piet, a collector of rare instinct; at his side sat M. Octave Uzanne, the able editor of *Le Livre*, and author of numerous works in which erudition, wit and artistic sentiment are

² *Paillet. Plaidoyers et discours, recueillis par Eugène Paillet, mis en ordre par Jules Le Berquier, avocat à la Cour de Paris*, Paris, Marchal Billard & Cie., 1881, 2 vols., 8vo, with two portraits.

pleasingly and remarkably blended;³ my left elbow touched that of the well-known collector M. Charles Cousin.⁴ Gathered round the table, or belonging to the Society, must yet be mentioned: the erudite bibliophile and ardent bouquiniste, M. A. Bégis; M. Henri Houssaye, whose studies on Greece and Hellenic art are too well known to need enumeration; the biographer of the artists of the eighteenth century, Baron Roger Portalis;⁵ and M. Henri Béraldi, who in collaboration with M. Portalis has authoritatively treated the engravers of the same period;⁶ M. Emmanuel Bocher, compiler of a catalogue of French engravings of that memorable epoch, &c.; Dr. E. Bougard, bibliographer of Les Contes Rémois; the bibliographer of Béranger, M. Jules Brivois; M. Fernand Petit, an authority on art in Spain;⁷ M. Marigues de Champ-Repus, who has published and annotated the poetical works of his ancestor Jacques de Champ-Repus; M. Louis Vian, whose *Histoire de Montesquieu* was crowned by the Académie Française; the critic and bibliographer M. Fernand Drujon, who has successfully caught up the fallen mantle of Gabriel Peignot;⁸ MM, Parran, Auguste Laugel,

³ The works of M. Uzanne are too numerous to admit of being fully enumerated here; but I desire, nevertheless, to call the attention of your readers to the last production of his facile pen - *L'évantaïl*, Paris, A. Quantin, 1882, an 8vo vol. of 143 pages, with numberless illustrations by M. Paul Avril, a masterpiece of typography with illuminated borders, and the illustrations printed in various colours in the text.

⁴ Author of *Voyage dans un Grenier, Faïences, Autographes et Bibelots*, Paris, Morgand et Fatout, 1878, 4to.

⁵ *Les Dessinateurs d'Illustrations au dix-huitième siècle*. Paris, Morgand et Fatout, 1877, 2 vols., 8vo.

⁶ *Les Graveurs du XVIII^e siècle* : Paris, Morgand et Fatout, 1880, 2 vols. 8vo.

⁷ *Notes sur l'Espagne artistique, par Fernand Petit, Docteur en Droits*, Lyon, N. Scheuring, 1878, 8vo.

⁸ *Catalogue des Ouvrages, écrits et Dessins poursuivis, supprimés ou condamnés depuis le 21 octobre 1814 jusqu'au 31 juillet 1877*, Paris, Rouveyre, 1878, 8vo.

H.-E. Lessore, Marcel de Marchdévillè, Truelle Saint-Evron, Dr. O. Cusco, all fervent lovers of the arts, and workers in various fields of literature; and last, but not least, the erudite bibliographer of Bordeaux, M. Gustave Brunet, who under the modest pseudonym of "Philomneste junior" has already outstripped his great predecessor; his works are too numerous to be given here, even in a footnote, and are too well known to need such mention. Place aux dames! The nation which can place on the list of its book collectors the names of Isabelle d'Este, Madame de Maintenon, Madame de Pompadour, Madame du Barry, Marie Antoinette, may be justly proud of its female bibliophiles. The Amis des Livres do not consequently exclude the fair sex from membership, and the portrait of Mme. Edmond Adam, fondatrice de la Nouvelle Revue, and authoress of several pleasant little works, forms a charming frontispiece to the *Annuaire* of the Society for 1881.

Having thus made acquaintance with some of the leading members, let us glance rapidly at the objects and achievements of the Society.

The first meeting of the founders took place on the 15th of March, 1874, from which date the Society may be said to have existed *de facto*, although it was not until 1880 that its statutes were approved by Government and it became a legally constituted body. The Amis des Livres are limited to fifty full members who must reside in Paris, and to twenty-five membres correspondants, either inhabitants of the provinces or foreigners.

It was at first proposed that the Society should edit and publish ancient and rare documents, interesting or valuable from a literary or historical point of view; but the majority of members desiring to pursue a less arid path, voted against this project, and it was decided that the publications should consist of popular works of imagination by eminent modern authors. In order to render their books more attractive, it was agreed that they

should be printed with all possible luxe, and adorned with engravings and etchings from original designs. So far the Society has issued the three following works: -

CHRONIQUE DU REGNE DE CHARLES IX., par Prosper Mérimée, illustrée de trente-et-une compositions dessinées et gravées à l'eau-forte par Edmund Morin, Paris, 1876, 1 vol., 8vo, edited by M. Eugene Paillet.

SCÈNES DE LA VIE DE BOHÈME, par Henry Murger, avec une frontispice et douze gravures à l'eau-forte par par Adolphe Bichard, Paris, 1879, 1 vol., 8vo, edited by M. Cherrier.

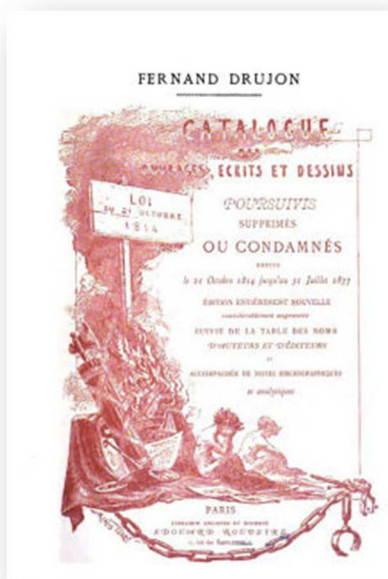
L'ELDORADO OU FORTUNION, par Théophile Gautier, avec 12 eaux-fortes de Milius et 81 dessins d'Avril, reproduits par l'héliographie, comprenant 27 fleurons, 27 culs-de-lampe et 27 lettres ornées en double épreuve, Paris, 1880, 1 vol., 8vo, edited by M. Billard.

These volumes, of which 115 copies only were issued, each copy numbered, and bearing the name of the member for whom it was destined, have risen in price to three or even six times their original value, and are indeed only procurable at the sales of their fortunate possessors. This limited issue of books so charmingly got up, and consequently so eagerly desired by collectors of taste, has met with censure at the hands of those unable to penetrate this *petite chapelle*:⁹ but in this respect every bookworm is, I believe, alike, and equally incorrigible; as long as book collecting exists, the collector will never cease to prize his acquisition in proportion to its rarity.

Besides the above-named publications the Society issues Annularies, which contain, in addition to the transactions, lists of

⁹ See an article by Francisque Sarcey in *Le XIXe Siècle*, No. for March 8, 1882.

members, &c., original articles by members, biographies of those deceased, illustrations, portraits, and other interesting matter.¹⁰(10)



Front wrapper of F. Drujon's *Catalogue des Ouvrages, écrits et Dessins poursuivis, supprimés ou condamnés depuis le 21 octobre 1814 jusqu'au 31 juillet 1877* (1878).



Henry Spencer Ashbee's bookplate, designed by J.-A. Chauvet.

¹⁰ A very good notice of *Les Amis des livres* will be found in the Dec, No., 1881, of *Le Livre*.