

A BOOKWORM FULL OF GUILT.

In one of the downtown streets is a big second hand book store, the proprietor of which makes a practice of buying up private libraries of a few hundred volumes. Frequently it happens that he thus comes into possession of rare editions, but as he knows nothing of books himself beyond the value of the volume judged by its paper print and binding, these rarities usually go at very small prices to those having knowledge of such things. A few bibliophiles make frequent visits to this store, and from the mass of cheap stuff occasionally pick out a treasure. One of these visitors in particular has made a little collection at very small cost from the book store. The proprietor did not know him until recently as a collector, and it would perhaps be better for the store's business if he never had made the discovery.

The discovery took place in this wise. A friend of the proprietor who knew the bibliophile saw him one day mousing about in a pile of newly acquired second hand books, and directed the proprietor's attention to him.

"Do you know who that thin bald man with the eye-glasses is?"

"Don't know him from Adam," replied the bookseller, "except that he comes in here now and then, and pays me a dollar or two for books that I'd be glad to get rid of at any price."

"The more fool you," said the other bluntly. "Has he bought anything to-day?"

"Jim is wrapping up a couple of bits of trash he's just bought. Here Jim let's see those books."

"How much did he pay for those?" inquired the proprietor, after looking at the books.

"Dollar'n a quarter apiece," said the salesman.

"And they would be cheap at twenty-five dollars for the two," said the other. "That old chap is one of the smartest collectors in town. Anything that he wants to buy is worth money. You may be sure of that."

"The old sneak!" ejaculated the bookseller. "I'll be even with him yet. Why, he must have cheated me out of hundreds of dollars. And I've been thinking all the while that I was doing him, because I made a hundred per cent. or so on everything I sold to him."

When next time the bibliophile came to the store to make some purchases he discovered a remarkable advance in prices, so great in some cases as to exceed greatly the real value of the book. With everything he sought to buy the case was the same. He went away without buying anything and came back a week later only to find the same prevailing conditions. Repeated visits led him to the conclusion that the proprietor of the place was profiting by the advice of some body who knew the value of rare editions. Then a sudden suspicion of the true nature of the case struck him, and he resolved to act upon it. Meantime the bookseller was rejoicing at the defeat of the despoiler.

"I've fixed him," he said to the man who had given him the advice. "Every book he's wanted to buy I've marked up to a big price, just about what it's worth, I guess, and I'll likely sell 'em at these prices. But he won't buy 'em. No; he's too stingy to pay a decent price for anything."

A few days later the bibliophile came in and the proprietor himself waited upon him. Acting on a well defined plan, the book lover rummaged about until he came upon a solid copy of one of the "Rollo" books, probably once the nucleus about which a Sunday school library had grown up. The book might have been worth 15 cents if anybody wanted it badly, but the expressions of admiration which the bibliophile let fall were such as to lead the innocent bookseller to suppose it a rare and valuable acquisition.

"Beautiful edition; beautiful," said the expert, blowing the dust from the edges. "Exquisite workmanship. Ah, here is an autograph inscription on the fly leaf, apparently done in a childish hand. Where are my glasses? Ah, yes, I can make it out with some difficulty. 'I have read this book—and it is—hum. Signed, J. M. S.' How very interesting! Very."

I should like to add this book to my collection. How much is it?"

"That book will cost you fifty dollars," replied the proprietor promptly.

"Ah; just so. That is a little more than I feel that I can afford just at present. May I ask where you got the volume and whether you have any more like it?"

"Bought it from a collector who had to sell out," said the mendacious proprietor. "I've got a dozen or so of them, and I guess they'll go like hot cakes as soon as I put 'em out where they can be seen."

"Undoubtedly, undoubtedly," agreed the other. "I hope that one, at least, will remain until I feel myself justified in expending so much upon it."

Thereupon he went on until he came to a pile of Congressional Records; value one cent per pound. The proprietor followed, watching every movement.

"What's this?" said the customer as he caught sight of the pile. "Congressional Records, and of the— Upon my soul, sir, you are fortunate! You have that rare edition of 1881. A treasure, sir. A veritable treasure!" He ran over the pamphlets hastily. "It appears to be a full set, too. Of course this set is far beyond my means, and I couldn't ask you to break into it by selling me two or three of the pamphlets which might come within reach of my purse. Ah, if I were only rich!"

The storekeeper made a mental note of the Congressional literary output, leaving his handkerchief on the pile so that he might make no mistake. Thence the book lover led him to several other worthless volumes, the value of which the proprietor noted. After wandering about for half an hour the expert departed with many lamentations over his personal financial stringency, and made way to the nearest place wherein he might treat himself to drinks, the bartender serving the drinks with fear and hesitation because of the suspicious manner in which the customer lugged himself and cackled in glee.

Since then the bibliophile goes frequently to the book shop, but buys naught. He looks at many volumes, so many that the book merchant can't note half of them, and having observed any editions of value he notes their location and sends a commissioner to buy them at small prices. Whenever he passes a certain set of "Rollo" books marked "This rare edition at five hundred dollars for the set of one dozen, or fifty dollars apiece," or a pile of conspicuously displayed Congressional Records, announced to an interested public as "Great historical value! Cheap at two hundred and twenty-five dollars," he is afflicted with severe attacks of coughing.

And in the soul of the bookseller there is a great and growing wonder that the rare editions, whose value he learned from such an indubitable source are left to moulder on his shelves by an un-discerning public.—New York Sun.

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