Books in the Middle Ages.

By Frederick Rogers.

There is a lovely little piece of word painting in Longfellow's "Golden Legend" which ought to be dear to all who care for books. The scene is the scriptorium in the Convent of Hirsau, in the Black Forest, and Father Pacificus is standing by the window looking out at the setting sun. The scriptorium is the chamber set apart in the convent for the writing and binding of books. Every great religious house had its scriptorium, wherein men, and youths undergoing their novitiate, found employment in the writing of service books for the church, or other books for the library. Father Pacificus, who is engaged in transcribing the New Testament, has finished his day's work, and now in the cool of the evening is pondering, as he is an old man, whether he shall have strength and grace given him to go on till he reaches the last words in the Apocalypse; when, nature lover that he is, he is carried out of his own sad thoughts by the beauty of the landscape, and utters the following tender and touching words:

"How sweet the air is! How fair the scene!
I wish I had as lovely a green
To paint my landscapes and my leaves!
How the swallows twitter under the eaves!
There now, there is one in her nest:
I can just catch a glimpse of her head and breast,
And will sketch her thus in her quiet nook
For the margin of my Gospel book."

The words express the true spirit of the medieaval artist in love with his work for its own sake, and gathering all the beauty he could see in nature to create the beautiful in art. In the middle ages the knowledge of the arts of writing and illuminating was almost entirely confined to the monks. They were also the custodians and binders of books. Strength first and then beauty, was the aim of the monastic binder when he was working for his convent, and the books were heavy with metallic bosses, clasps, and corner plates fixed to the great oak boards. In the German and Italian religious houses to-day the visitor is often shown

"A volume old and brown,
A large tome bound
In brass and wild boar's hide,
Wherein was written down
The names of all who had died
In the convent."

There is, however, ample evidence to show that monks were not always the careful stewards that some writers would make them appear. Father Berington, a scholarly and fair-minded Roman Catholic priest of the beginning of the present century, furnishes valuable information of the state of the monasteries, and complains bitterly of the idleness and ignorance of the clergy, and of their shameful neglect of the books it was their duty to preserve. The majority of them were without any appreciation of the value of literature, or care for what was committed to their charge. It was the select few to whom their labour was really a prayer, like Father Pacificus in the poem, who created the beautiful illuminated missals that are of such priceless value now. The scriptorium, even though estates were sometimes given for its sole support, was never very much crowded with workers.

A famous Englishman of the fourteenth century, Richard de Bury, who was Bishop of Durham and King's Treasurer from 1333 to 1355, has displayed his love for books in a delightful treatise called "Philobiblon," and has left a record of the lending library of his time. Tutor to Edward III., when that monarch was a prince, and his faithful friend and adviser when he was king, Richard de Bury was a powerful man in the realm, and he used his power to help the poor, and to forward learning by the collection of books. He had been a monk himself and knew the carelessness of the monks, and he lashes them pitilessly with his sarcastic pen for the way they neglected their libraries. He laces them for their bad morals, too; he was a man of pure life himself, but he seems to have regarded the neglect of books as being almost as great a sin as a breach of the seventh commandment. In a passage of inimitable descriptive writing he illustrates at once his monastic aversion to women, and his passionate love for books, making the books themselves raise their voices in protest against the neglect of degenerate priests.

"In the first place," say the books, "we are expelled with heart and hand from the domains of the clergy apportioned to us by hereditary right, in some interior chamber of which we had our peaceable cells; but to their shame, in these nefarious times we are altogether banished to suffer opprobrium out of doors; our places, moreover, are occupied by hounds and hawks, and sometimes by a biped beast—woman to wit—whose cohabitation was formerly shunned by the clergy, from whom we have ever taught our pupils to fly more than from the asp and the basilisk; wherefore this beast, spaying us at last in a corner protected only by the web of some long deceased spider, drawing her forehead into wrinkles, laughs us to scorn, abuses us in virulent speeches, points us out as the only superfluous furniture lodged in the whole house, complains that we are useless for any purpose of domestic economy whatever, and recommends our being bartered away forthwith. . . .

"We labour under various diseases; our back and sides ache; our native whiteness, perspicuous with light, is now turned tawny and yellow, so that no medical man who may find us out can doubt that we are afflicted with jaundice; some of us are gouty, as our diseased extremities evidently indicate. The damp, smoke, and dust with which we are constantly infected dim the field of our visual rays, and superinduce opthalmia upon our already bleared eyes. . . . We are thrown into dark corners, ragged, shivering, and weeping; or with holy Job seated on a dunghill. . . . We are sold like slaves and female captives, or left as pledges in taverns without redemption. We are given to cruel butchers to be cut up like sheep and cattle. . . . Every butcher, cobbler, and tailor whatever, or any artificer of whatever trade, keeps us shut up in prison for the superfluous and lascivious pleasures of the clergy."
To remedy evils of this kind Richard de Bury
organized a library at Durham College in the
University at Oxford, to which he bequeathed his
own books at his death, and organised also a
system of lending books which is most elaborate
and careful in safeguarding such treasures. No
needy scholar ever knocked at the door of his palace
at Bishop Auckland in vain. The library he founded,
and in which he took care that those who knew the
art of binding as well as that of transcribing should
be, lasted till the Reformation, and then was scattered,
ever to be collected again. From his account of his
own experience it would seem as though some of the
evils he complained of are permanent; certain it is
that there are things in the following picture of a
careless reader that are as true of careless readers
in the present century as they were of those of the
fourteenth, as many a librarian would testify.

"You will perhaps see a stiff-necked youth lounging
sulkishly in his study while the frost pinches him in
winter time; oppressed with cold his watery nose
drops, nor does he take the trouble to wipe it with his
handkerchief till it has moistened the book beneath
it with its vile dew. For such a one I would substitute
a cobbler's apron in the place of his book. He has a
nail like a giant's, perfumed with a stinking odour,
with which he points out the place of any pleasant
subject. He distributes innumerable straws in various
places, with ends in sight, that he may recall by the
mark what his memory cannot retain. These straws,
which the stomach of the book cannot digest, and
which nobody takes out, at first distend the book from
its accustomed closure, and being carelessly left to
oblivion, at last become putrid. He is not ashamed
to eat fruit and cheese over an open book, and to
transfer his empty cup from side to side upon it;
and because he has not his alms bag at hand he
leaves the rest of the fragments in his books."

Straws and nailmarks do not disfigure books now,
but of crumbs and fruit stains even the volumes of
the British Museum could testify.

Kings in medizval days were often friends to book-
binders, but more often they were borrowers of books
which they never meant to return. At the death of
King Henry V., there was much trouble over the books
His Majesty had borrowed. The Countess of West-
moreland sent a petition to his executors for a couple
of volumes, which petition is extant in the Bodleian
Library. The Prior of Christ Church, Canterbury, had
sent him the writings of St. Gregory, and the King
had apparently lent them again to the Prior of Shene,
and the two priests had a furious quarrel over the
said books. The University at Paris had such a bad
opinion of Louis XI. (there was everything to warrant
it, certainly!) that they would not lend him a book
unless he left some valuable in pledge for its return,
and gave a joint bond with one of his chief ministers
that its return should duly take place when he had
finished with it. King Edward IV., according to his
wardrobe accounts, which are still extant, paid to his
bookbinder, Piers Bauduy, for "binding, gilding,
dressing" a couple of books, twenty shillings
each, and for four books sixteen shillings each. This
was apparently for labour only, as we read also that
he delivered to the binder "six yards of velvet, six
yards of silk, laces, tassels, copper and gilt clasps,
and gilt nails." When the difference in the value of
money is remembered, it will not be seen how costly
these books were. We need not wish the middle
ages back again, but it would be better for the craft,
and better for the handicraftsman too, if some of the
artistic spirit which distinguished the artisans of
that time could be breathed into our nineteenth
century work.

A New Pen Book.

A new "pen book" has just been issued by the
W. O. Hickok Manufacturing Co., of Harris-
burg, Pa. The pen book is used for measuring
the space between ruled lines on work. The stationer
uses the pen book in order to show his
patrons the several widths of spacing which the ruler
is able to furnish; the travelling salesman for the
manufacturing stationer uses the pen book as does
his superior; the large customer of the stationer finds
the pen book useful when making up copy for new
stationery; therefore the pen book has become a part
of the equipment of the first-class bindery, stationery
store, wholesale stationery manufacturer, and the
salesman. In the company's new pen book illustrations
are given of the use of "point system" type in connec-
tion with the use by the ruler of "point system" pens,
a point that will appeal to the accurate printer.
Various spaces ruled with pens and interlined
with various sizes of type are shown, with an explana-
tion in every instance as to how the printer may lead his
type lines without the use of cardboard, paper, etc.,
to fit the new "point system," Therefore the book is of
as great value to the printer as to the ruler. It is not
like the ordinary catalogue, which is given away with
the hope of increasing purchases, but is as much a
necessity to the trade as a foot rule is to a carpenter—
neither can well measure his work without such a
device. A charge of twelve cents is made for
the book, but this does not by any means cover the cost.

DID THE FLOOD IN TWO THOUSAND WORDS.—If the
Chaldean flood tablet which Johns Hopkins
University sent to the American Bible Society is a fair sample
of the books of 4000 years ago, a Chaldean Library as
extensive as the Astor Library would cover Manhattan
Island. The tablet is a complete book in itself. It is
a plaster cast from a modern reproduction in clay of the
eleventh book of the so-called Izdubar or Gilig-
mesh legends. It contains the Chaldean account of
the flood, written in cuneiform text more than two
thousand years before Christ. The tablet is about
ten inches long by seven wide and three-quarters of
an inch thick. It is written on both sides in three
columns and contains 331 lines, or about 2000 words.
The restoration is the work of Professor Paul Haupt,
Hopkins University, one of the first scholars of his day
in the study of antiquities. The original tablet was
found during the British excavations in the valley of
the Euphrates and Tigris, and was broken in thirteen
pieces, which are now in the British Museum.