Vespasiano of Florence:

THE LAST PUBLISHER OF MANUSCRIPT BOOKS.

In order to give our readers an idea of the importance of BOOK-BINDING and the estimation in which it was held in the fifteenth century, we offer them a brief account of the most celebrated publisher and bookseller of Florence in that age.

Before the invention of printing, the making of a book was a work of high art. The scribe or copyist wrote the text; the painter illuminated its pages with gold and glowing colour on the finest parchment; and the binder covered it with the finest velvet or morocco from the Levant, or embroidery, or wrought beautiful covers in wood or inlaid ivory, the goldsmith chiselled delicate devices. Of course such works were only to be obtained by wealthy princes. Borso d'Este paid forty ducats for a *Josephus* and a *Quintus Curtius*, while his large two-volume *Bible* cost him 1375 sequins (about £650).

In reading Vespasiano's Lives, one forms a very good idea of the business of a bookseller and publisher, before the invention of printing. Vespasiano di Bisticchi (born A.D. 1421) was an author and bookseller in Florence. As an author, his works go far...
to redeem the character of the age, for in his "Vite degli Uomini Illustri and his Ricordi delle Donne State in Italia degne," he has shown all that those brilliant and corrupt times contained of the pure and good. His services to literature were immense; he assisted to form the three most famous libraries in Italy—the Laurentian, in Florence; that of the Vatican, in Rome; and the library of Federigo, Duke of Urbino, which is now, since its purchase by Pope Alexander VII., incorporated with that of the Vatican. Vespasiano gives a detailed list of the works he obtained for the Duke of Urbino, which comprised all the known classics, the Fathers, books on Astrology, Science, Medicine, Art, Music, and all the Italian authors and poets. In this magnificent library, which cost 30,000 ducats, every author was found complete, not a word of his known writings was missing; every page was written on parchment with a pen and illuminated, and every book was properly bound. Vespasiano says, there was not one written of which ne sarebbe vergognato (he could have been ashamed). The great Bible, illuminated throughout, was bound in gold brocade, and had rich silver clamps and clasps. All the editions of the Greek and Latin Fathers and other classics were bound in crimson velvet with silver clasps. Vespasiano prides himself on the completeness of his work. He says he went to England for the catalogue of the Oxford library, and also obtained catalogues of the libraries of Italian cities, but in all he found that they only possessed fragmentary writings, and in very few cases had they the entire works of an author.

The bibliophile Niccolò Niccoli, having spent a long life and all his patrimony in collecting MSS. and books, left them, at his death, to Cosimo de' Medici to found a public library. Cosimo built the fine pillared hall in the convent of San Marco, and then conceived the idea of filling it, so as to form a worthy Public Library, of which the legacy of Niccoli should be the nucleus. Naturally, he had recourse to the great bookseller, and sending for Vespasiano, asked him how he advised him to furnish his bookcases.

"You could not buy books—it would be impossible to find enough," said Vespasiano. "Then what am I to do?" asked Cosimo. "Have them written," replied the bookseller.

On which Cosimo gave him the commission, and the bookseller forthwith employed forty-five scribes and illuminators, furnishing two hundred volumes in twenty-two months; and so pleased was Cosimo with the books, that he employed Vespasiano and his scribes to supply the illuminated Psalters and Missals for the new Church of the Convent of San Marco.

Vespasiano was the last of his profession, for even while he worked, Gutenberg, in Mainz, had brought printing to perfection, had discarded his wooden blocks and used leaden types; and while Vespasiano illuminated the Duke of Montefeltro's Bible, Gutenberg and Fust, in 1450, printed their Mazarine* Bible.

The city of Mainz was taken and sacked, in 1462, by Archbishop Adolfe, of Nassau, and all business matters were thrown into confusion. The workmen of Fust dispersed to carry their art into other countries, and before 1470 there were printing presses at work in every important city of Italy, Germany, and the Low Countries. About the same time, Caxton got his type from Bruges and went to England to establish himself in the precincts of Westminster Abbey, and three Germans set up their printing press in Paris, within the walls of the Sorbonne. Nearly all these men who were thus driven abroad, were binders as well as printers, and many of them also performed the office of publishers.—LEADER SCOTT.

* So called because a magnificent copy was found in the Library of Cardinal Mazarin.