ROGER DE COVERLY, LONDON.

Roger de Coverly is the descendant of a family which came from France and settled in London in the early part of the eighteenth century. He was born in London on the 12th of February, 1831, and at the age of fourteen years was apprenticed to Mr. Joseph Zaehnsdorf, sen., who then carried on business at 49 Great Queen-street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, where he lived indoors. The usual hours for apprentices were then from 7 a.m. till 9 p.m., or leaving out two hours for meals, twelve hours of work per day—leaving little time for mental improvement. Young de Coverly had always been passionately fond of music, and when about eighteen years of age he determined to learn to play the violin, but difficulties presented themselves: he could only obtain lessons in the morning, and had to get Mr. Zaehnsdorf's permission to be absent from work one day in the week for that purpose, while his practice had to be taken in the evening after nine o'clock and before commencing work in the morning, Saturdays and Sundays excepted. Apart from these natural difficulties of apprentice life nothing important transpired, and in the early part of 1851 he became tired of the colourless and humdrum existence and resolved to end it. He approached his employer, and managed to persuade Mr. Zaehnsdorf to make him a present of the remainder of his time some nine months before its expiration. His desire was to get some insight into the bookselling business, as it was his own and his father's wish that he should commence business for himself as soon as possible as a bookseller and binder combined. Accordingly, having got possession of his indentures on May 1st, he set to work endeavouring to get an engagement at some bookseller's, and on this quest called upon the late John Lilly, the then eminent bookseller of Pall Mall. After hearing his application, Mr. Lilly spoke very kindly to him; he was unable to employ him, but strongly, very strongly, advised him to stick to his handcraft, telling him there was a better prospect of success in the binding than in the bookselling trade. Finding a similar want of encouragement in other quarters, he thought over Mr. Lilly's advice, and, with his father's counsel, joined the London Consolidated Society of Journeymen Bookbinders, with the intention of improving his practice at the trade as a journeyman, for a time. During the interim he was not idle, but spent about four hours per day in assisting a friend who kept a stationer's shop; he also set up a press in his father's house, and commenced binding such of his father's and his own books as required it. Before long, however, he obtained employment in the establishment of Messrs. J. & J. Leighton, of Brewer-street, Golden-square, whose work in the exhibition of 1851 had particularly taken his attention. Here he found most of his fellow workmen very agreeable companions, and many a good game of chess was played during the dinner hour, for about this time, 1853, the Bookbinders' Amateur Chess Club was originated by the employés in this establishment, the first meetings being held in the "White Horse" Tavern, Holborn. He remained with Messrs. Leighton, with occasional intervals for holidays, until October, 1863, parting from them with a deep sense of the great kindness and consideration that he had ever received from both Messrs. John and James Leighton. At the same time he took honourable leave of the Trade Society—and would pay a passing tribute of respect to the ever genial courtesy of the late T. J. Dunning, then secretary—and commenced business on his own account.
His first workshops were two rooms, the first and second floors of a small house in the neighbourhood of Leicester-square, the lower part of which was used as a carpenter's shop. He had collected a large quantity of work from friends to have a stock to commence upon, but well knowing that this could not last, his first care on the first day of his business life was to obtain some customers from among the booksellers. Accordingly, shortly after reaching his workshops, he left his errand boy in charge and sallied forth in quest of orders. He first called upon the late Mr. Basil Montagu Pickering, of Piccadilly, taking with him one or two specimens. Possibly it was an opportune moment, at any rate Mr. Pickering seemed somewhat favourably impressed, and gave him an order at once; this he took as a good omen, and persevered in canvassing the best portion of the book trade, but did not succeed at the time, nor for years afterwards, in obtaining work from the trade worth doing, other than that of Mr. Pickering. He continued, however, to do a large portion of that, until the lamented death of that gentleman; indeed, at that time he had grown to look upon Mr. Pickering more in the light of a personal friend than a customer. After a time, however, other customers came in, one recommending another, but for two or three years it was somewhat uphill work. For a short time during those early years he did everything himself—sewing, forwarding, and finishing; the profits were small, but of course the expenses were also small, and he just managed to hold on. He was on one occasion just on the point of giving up the struggle, when, calling upon Mr. Pickering, he was kindly advised not to do so, the advice being accompanied with a fresh supply of work. During this time he was greatly assisted by his wife, who carried on a school for young ladies at Kensington, where they resided, so that while one was sinking money in a business that yielded no immediate profit, the other was, by her teaching, providing the funds to continue the struggle against adverse circumstances.

About the year 1867-8 he obtained a portion of the binding for the Melbourne Library through a bookseller for whom he had commenced to work, and this gave a fresh impetus to the business, so that things went on improving for a year or two; then the Melbourne work was lost, and it was a great blow. He was not daunted by the loss, but, as it has always been his aim to work excellently rather than cheaply, it seemed advisable rather to remove to some better position, and finding a house in course of erection which was likely to suit his purpose, he secured it, and removed his family to No. 6 St. Martin's-court, Charing Cross-road, where the business is now carried on. Having thus obtained room for a larger business, the work had to be obtained. This was in 1870, and shortly afterwards he called upon Mr. S. F. Ellis, at that time in King-street, Covent-garden, afterwards in New Bond-street, from whom he obtained an order at once, and he has continued to work for the same firm up to the present time. From Mr. Ellis, Mr. de Coverly was recommended to Mr. William Morris, the poet, and in turn recommended Mr. de Coverly to other excellent customers.

In the year 1883 Mr. Cobden Sanderson, of the Inner Temple, who was then a customer, went to Mr. de Coverly as a pupil, and made very satisfactory progress during the six or seven months that he passed under tuition at about three or four hours per day. He has since become a very skilful finisher, and Mr. de Coverly is very proud of him as a pupil, although Mr. Sanderson has developed one or two fads of which his former teacher greatly disapproves. Mr. Cobden Sanderson sets up his own short experience as to the best form of a book against the usages of centuries and the universal custom of the trade.

Mr. de Coverly has two sons associated with him as assistants; one at the forwarding, and the other in the finishing department; these he can confidently trust to carry on the business during his occasional absences either in the country or abroad. The business is still not very large, but rather select, and numbers amongst its customers some very eminent names. He does not now give his whole attention to his binding business, having besides, one or two hobbies; he is an enthusiastic amateur musician and collector of old music, vocal and instrumental; he has founded two or three glee and madrigal societies, and loves above all to take part in orchestral concerts or string quartettes, varied with glee singing; and he is a member of the Royal Choral Society.

He has given some considerable attention to stained and marbled calf work, and is mentioned by Octave Uzanne in "La Reliure Moderne," in respect of his marbled calf and vellum work, some fine specimens of which have at different times been on exhibition. He recommends morocco in preference to any other material for the best bindings, but he makes a specialty of vellum bindings. Upon one subject he feels strongly: his opinion is that a certain machine used in some cloth shops for sewing cannot be too strongly condemned. It sews with thread or cotton, which rips the sheet up in the fold at the back for a short distance both at top and bottom, and thus wounds the book in its most vital part. He shewed us some examples of this miserable work, and pointed out how, with the poor paper used by some publishers, it is rendered almost impossible for the binder to make a good and durable book of a volume that has been treated in this manner.

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