

## A Famous Book Shop.



HATCHARD'S book shop in Piccadilly is one of the many historic houses in this very historic thoroughfare. Nearly a hundred years ago it was a kind of bookish free and easy, where men of letters met for books, gossip, and news. To-day Hatchard's is more bookish than ever, but one of the most fashionable of West-end bookshops.

Bent on an interview (says a *Chronicle* interviewer), I betook me the other day to this famous bookshop. Hatchard is now Arthur Humphreys, and his partner Edwin Shepherd, but the original John Hatchard—urbane old man, as the chronicles tell us he was—could not have received me more kindly. Indeed, Mr. Humphreys, who elected to face the interview, buckled down to my questions with a geniality which in similar circumstances I could not for a minute hope to attain. Besides being a bookseller he is a student and lover of books, and has written one or two.

"When," I asked, "and under what circumstances was Hatchard's founded?"

"The business," said Mr. Humphreys, "was founded in the year 1797 by John Hatchard, who had formerly been in the employ of that famous bookseller, Honest Tom Payne. This was a great man in his day, and his shop, where the National Gallery now stands, was a favourite resort of authors. There, I suppose, Hatchard became acquainted with many writers of the day, and when he set up business on his own account they made his place a centre. Hatchard, who seems to have been a shrewd, able man in his way, was of course anxious to have the big men look in on him. For instance, I have a letter which he wrote to Dr. Burney, the historian of music, asking for his custom. He got the custom, and, further, Burney promised to recommend him to his friend Richard Porson."

"It was in this way, then, that the beginnings of the business were laid?"

"Yes, but the real foundation of the business was the publication of a pamphlet, entitled 'Reform or Ruin.' Its author was John Bowdler, the father of that Thomas who afterwards distinguished himself by 'bowdlerising' Shakespeare. I suppose there was considerable ground for the pamphlet, which was a bitter, strong, and powerful attack on current scandals at court. It was the boldness and daring of the pamphlet that amazed people, and gave it quite a remarkable vogue. Edition after edition was published, and I have myself two copies of different editions."

"Nobody, neither Bowdler nor Hatchard, got 'put away' for it?"

"No; John Hatchard went on publishing and selling religious books, for really that was practically the backbone of the trade. Indeed, up to ten years ago Hatchard's was still essentially a religious bookseller's. I need hardly tell you that now we are booksellers in the broadest sense of the word. We sell books of every sort and kinds, and we think we

can enlighten people upon almost any book they may be looking for. My notion of a bookseller—bookseller distinct from a mere seller of books—is that he should be a kind of walking catalogue of literature."

"Do the upper ten buy very largely of books?"

"They do, as you might yourself see by looking in on us any afternoon you're passing. I should say that the bulk of our buyers are ladies, or rather that ladies buy more than men. In a recent article in the *Fortnightly*, Mr. Andrew Lang said he did not know any lady of distinction who could tell the difference between wide margins and narrow—who, in a word, knew about a book as a book. Speaking from my own experience, I entirely disagree with him. I believe there is an increasing number of ladies who take a deep interest in beautiful paper, fine bindings, and so on. In other words, I see signs which lead me to think that in the not very far distant future the collection of valuable books will not remain a hobby for men only. Book collectors are arising, sir, among the fair sex, and from a trade point of view I'm bound to say the development is an excellent one."

"To what do you attribute this advance of bookishness among women?"

"My own notion is that to some extent it is a result of the American woman in English society."

"Taking your readers generally, men as well as women, are there at the present day any marked tendencies toward special subjects or periods in literature?"

"Two illustrations in answer to your question occur to me: one the penchant for eighteenth century literature, the other the interest in works on gardening and horticulture generally. Several influences are responsible for the devotion to subjects and themes of the eighteenth century. Lecky's 'History of the Eighteenth Century' has been one influence; Austin Dobson's writings another; Reginald Brett's a third. Then the reprints of 'Dorothy Osborne's Letters' and the 'Chesterfield Letters' have caused a wide demand, and there is an undying interest in Horace Walpole. The interest in garden literature appertains most markedly to women, and perhaps it may be referred back to the publication of a little book by 'E.V.B.' (Mrs. Boyle) on 'Days and Hours in a Garden,' an account of the authoress's own garden near Burnham Beeches. I rather suspect that the interest in horticulture on the part of most ladies is a purely literary one. That is to say, they don't themselves garden exactly, but they like to read about gardens."

"I take it you have yet to tell me what it is essentially the upper ten, the West End, read?"

"Yes; we have more or less been wandering through West End literary byways. The great literary highway in the West End is fiction—fiction dashed with adventure and biography. Undoubtedly, novels are the literary pabulum of the mass of the people in the West End. Women seem never to tire of ghost stories and detective stories; they like mystery, a substantial splash of sensation, in their daily reading. Doyle's 'Adventures of Sherlock Holmes' are regarded as the very best in the way of detective stories. Military men, and men who have travelled, as all well-to-do people have more or

