WHAT BECOMES OF BOOKS.

HOW LITERARY TREASURES PERISH BY FIRE, FLOOD, AND DECAY.

The 500,000 Books Witnessed by St. Paul—Miniature Forests in Mould Spots—An Ivy Vine Destroying Books Worth a Fortune—Something of Bibliophiles, Bibliopoles, Bibliolaisis, Bibliomagiers, and Bibliotaphs.

The world has never had so many books as to-day, and but for the destroying agents that keep pace with the progress of book making, the present rapid multiplication of books would soon usurp for printed volumes an undue share of space suitable for their preservation. The rain and the sunshine, the frost and the thaw, gaslight and heat, mould and decay, children and servants, prepare the books in modern households for the kindling of fires sooner or later, or for the junkman—the modern undertaker of literature.

It is estimated that not less than 25,000 new books are published every year, running through editions numbering from 1,000 to 25,000 volumes. There are now 1,100,000 printed books in the British Museum Library, and there are 3,000,000 books in the Bibliotheque Nationale of Paris. Our American libraries are wonderfully large for a new country, and it is believed that there are larger collections of books in libraries now than ever before. Bibliophiles of to-day do not trust the old stories of the enormous number and value of the books destroyed at Carthage and at Alexandria. Even with the steam press, which has been working a half century, it is extremely difficult to collect a half million different books in a modern library, and the accounts of old writers of the wonderful extent of ancient libraries are doubted, because of the scarcity of books before the invention of printing. While some bibliophiles estimate that probably not one thousandth part of the books that have been are still extant, they are not disposed to mourn their destruction, for doubtless mountains of rubbish were removed, which, if the cleansing fires had not come, would have rendered destructive measures necessary for sheer want of space in which to store so many volumes.

The libraries of MSS. collected by the Egyptian Ptolemies were doubtless famous throughout the world, and when they were burned in Cesar's Alexandrian war B. C. 48, at Alexandria, and again by the Saracens, A. D. 640, an immense loss was inflicted upon mankind; but although Gibbon, the historian, accepts the story that 700,000 volumes were thus destroyed, many book men gravely doubt it. These volumes, like all of the manuscripts of the early ages were written on sheets of parchment, with a wooden roller at each end, so that the reader needed only to unroll a portion at a time. The most great destruction of books was at Carthage, when 500,000 books are said to have been burned. In Acts, xix. 19, St. Luke narrates that, after the preaching of Paul, many of the Ephesians "which used curious arts brought their books together and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it to be 50,000 pieces of silver." This bonfire, it is estimated, cost the Ephesians over $90,000 in our money. It is believed that the books destroyed were little parchment scrolls, upon which magic sentences were written, forming books of black, profound divination, alchemy, enchantments, and witchcraft. None of the MS. of that age is now extant, and probably if St. Paul had not incited the Ephesians to burn these writings, which, it is believed, he denounced as spiritually injurious, they would have been destroyed by the teeth of time ere this, and their ashes would be worth Jay Gould's fortune, for the scrolls doubtless contained illustrations of early heathenism, of devil worship, serpent worship, and sun worship, early astrological and chemical lore, and symbols of the archaic forms of religion derived from the Egyptians, the Persians, and the Greeks. These scrolls were used as charms against all evils, and protection especially against the "evil eye." Their manufacture as late as the fourth century formed an extensive trade, and it has not wholly died out yet, although now in another form. The Ephesians carried their books to Paul, as one can gain admission to it except in the company of two Fellows of the college, and if a single book is lost, the whole collection goes to a neighboring college. A life-long imprisonment is also inflicted upon many treasures in the Imperial Museum, Haarlem, in the Guildhall Library, London, and in Holland, in the old Romish Church led to the destruction of thousands of books, secular as well as sacred. They needed only to contain illuminated letters to be doomed to destruction. The paper books went to heat the ovens of bakers, and the parchment went to the boot makers. A noble copy of the first edition of the "Golden Legend," 1483, was used leaf by leaf to light a librarian's fires before the revolution in France. A copy of Caxton's edition of the Canterbury Tales, with wood cuts, worth at least $2,000, was used to light the very fire of the French Protestant Church, St. Martin's le Grand, in London, twenty years ago. A peddler bought, in June, 1844, from a widow in a cottage at Byron, England, the "Boke of St. Albans" for ninepence, sold it for three shillings to a chemist, who offered it for a guinea to a stationer, who sold it for five pounds to Stark, a bibliopole, and the Right Honorable Thomas Grenville finally paid him £70 for it. The great Shakespearian discoveries, found in a garret at Lamport Hall in 1867, were saved from destruction by mere chance. Fifteen hundred volumes, which in 1775 the Benedict monks of Antwerp gave to their gardener to clean out what they believed to be rubbish, were subsequently sold for 14,000 francs. Carlyle's first manuscript of the "History of the French Revolution" was used by a char woman to light a fire.

Bibliophiles heap execration upon the memory of John Bagford, an antiquarian shoemaker who has been named the "Bibliolaisis." He was a great grandfather of the bibliomania of the last century, from library to library, tearing away title pages from rare books of all sizes, which he sorted out into nationalities and towns, and so with a lot of handbills, manuscript notes, and miscellaneous collections of all kinds, formed over a hundred folio volumes now preserved in the British Museum—the remains of many rare works. Bibliopegists have ruined the sacred vestments of many rare old works, reduced noble marginals, and put into dandified dress-coats that should be in their primitive boards; but print collectors—the rich men who have the mania for privately illustrating books—have proved the greatest modern bibliolasts, on the theory that everything which diminishes the interest of a book is inimical to its preservation. The late Sir Thomas Phillips of Middle Hill, Eng., was a noteworthy bibliotaph. He bought bibliographical treasures only to bury them, and his mansion was crammed with books. He bought whole libraries, and never even saw what he had bought. The first book printed in the English language, The Recuell of the Histories of Troye, translated and printed by Wynkyn de Worde for the Duchess of Burgoyne, sister to Edward IV., is believed to be in his collection, although he could never find it. The curious library of Samuel Pepys, the well-known diarist, is imprisoned in its original book cases at Magdalene College, Cambridge. No