

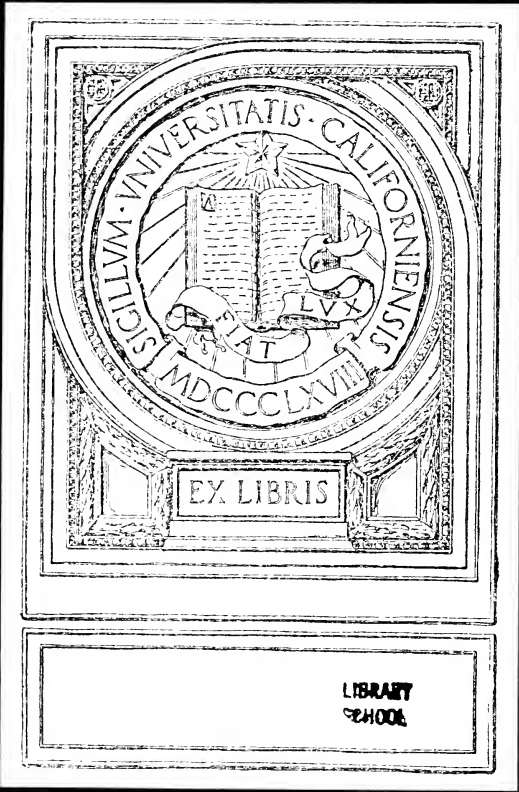
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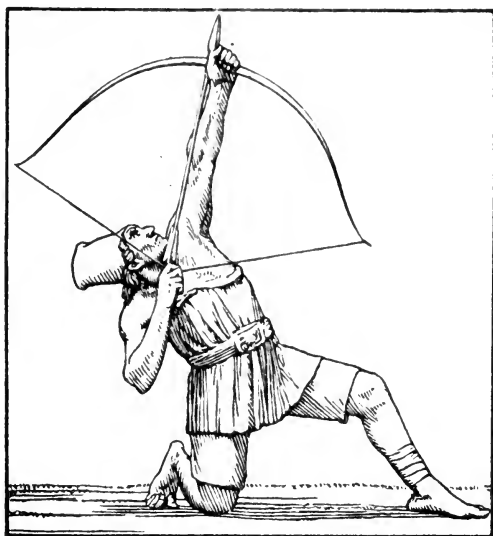
**PHYSICAL PROPERTIES**  
**of Books**

AS THEY ARE AT PRESENT PUBLISHED

UNDERTAKEN BY

*The Society of Calligraphers*

PRICE 50 CENTS



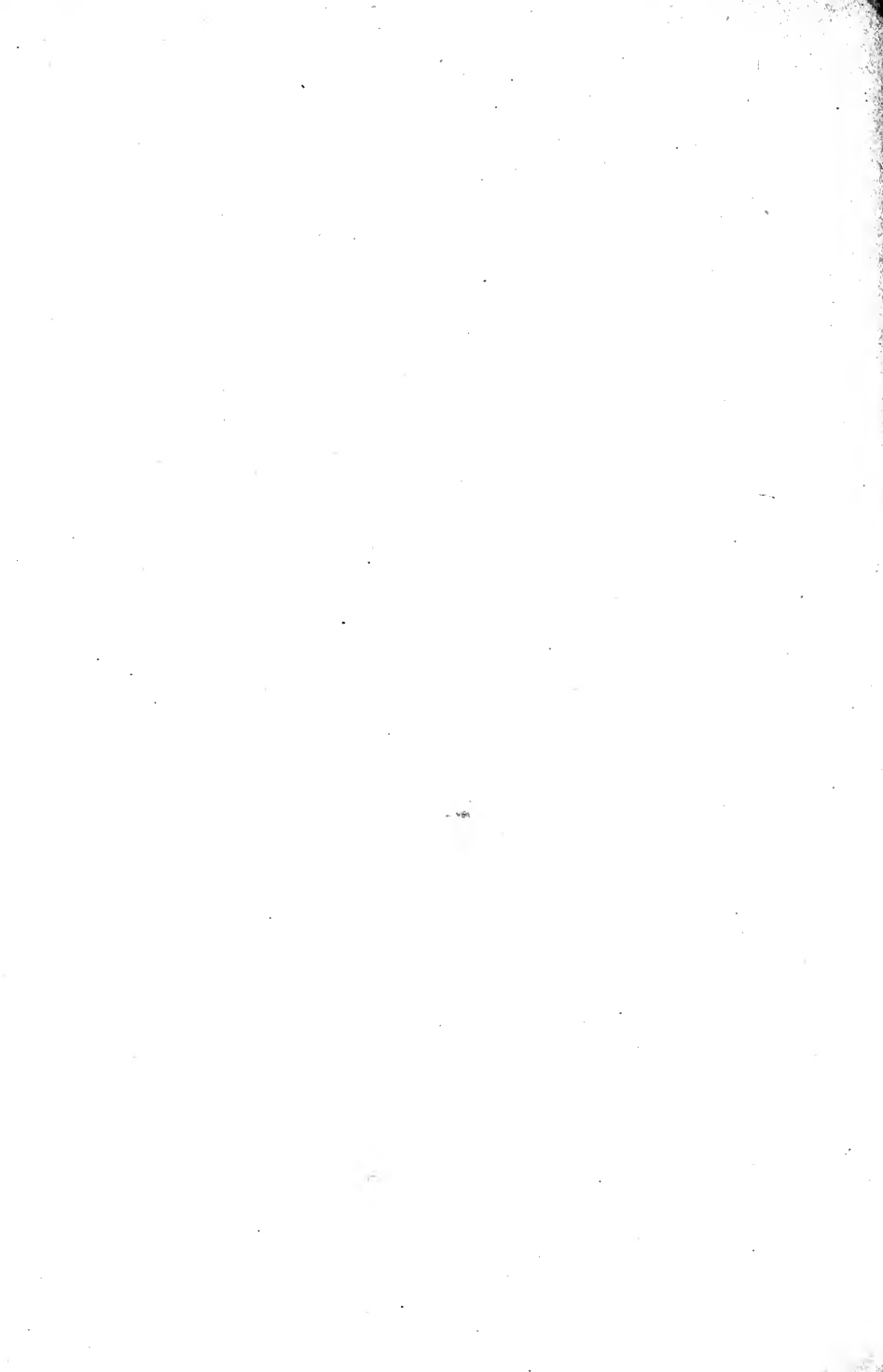
1919

*Published for the Society of Calligraphers by*

W. A. DWIGGINS AND

L. B. SIEGFRIED

BOSTON



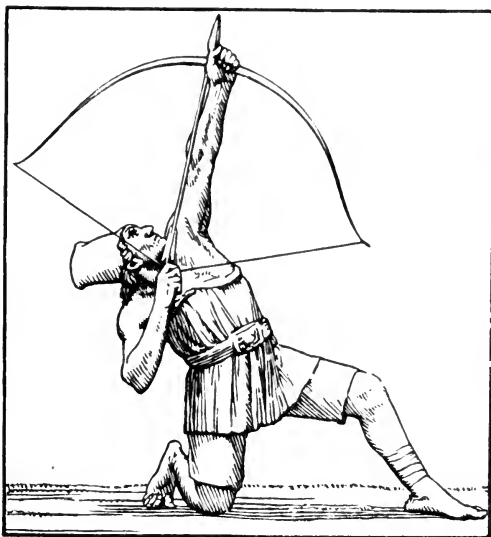
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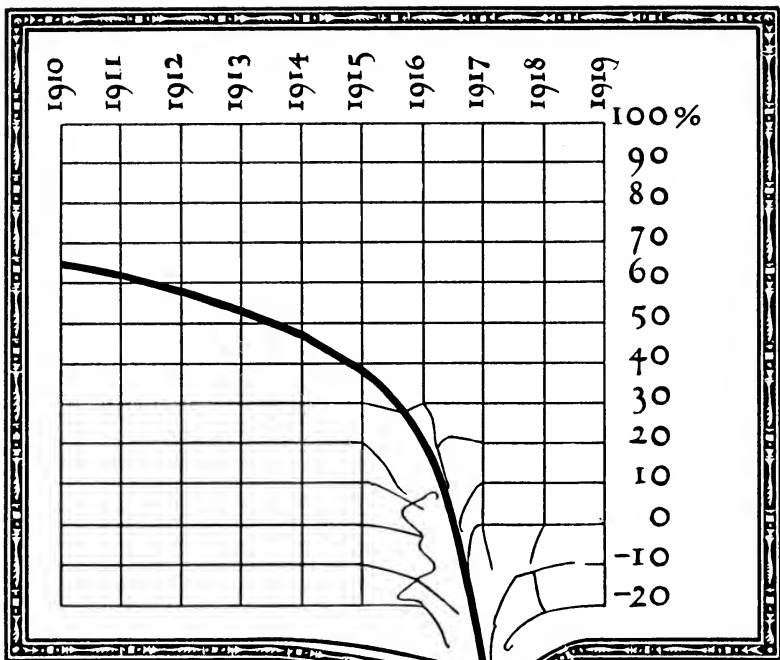
## NOTE

*The accompanying extracts from the Transactions of the Society of Calligraphers are published with the approval of the Society. They form a part of the exhaustive and unbiassed Report returned by the Committee in charge of the Investigation, which Report will be presented in its entirety in the Annual Bulletin. The report is of so surprising a nature that it was deemed unwise to withhold all notice of the findings until the annual publication. The Society, therefore, has the honour to present certain portions of the Inquiry together with an abstract of the Committee's recommendations.*

W. A. DWIGGINS, *Secretary*

384A Boylston Street, Boston  
December 1, 1919

438996



A chart showing the percentage of excellence in the physical properties of books published since 1910.



# Transactions of the Society of Calligraphers



**I**T may be said in introduction that the Society's Investigation into the Physical Properties of Books was undertaken by a special committee whose personnel insured that its consideration would be thorough and unbiassed.

The Committee began its labour by an examination of all books published in America since the year 1910. This examination forced upon the investigators the conclusion that "All Books of the present day are Badly Made." The conclusion was unanimous.

Working out from this basic fact in an effort to arrive at the reasons underlying the evil, the Committee held numerous sittings in consultation with men concerned with various branches of printing and publishing. From these sittings there developed a mass of information of an unusual and stimulating character.

The publishers have chosen from the Record of the examination a few examples, not because they are extraordinary but because they present typical points of view. They are transcribed verbatim. It will be obvious that in certain cases it has been no more than courteous to suppress the names of the persons assisting the investigation. For the sake of uniformity it has been deemed wise to follow this practice throughout.

## I. MR. B.

Q. Mr. B——, will you please tell the committee why you printed this book on card-board?

A. To make it the right thickness. It had to be one inch thick.

— Why that thick, particularly?

— Because otherwise it would not sell. If a book isn't one inch thick it won't sell.

— Do you mean to say that people who buy books select them with the help of a foot rule?

— They have to have some standard of selection.

— So that it is your practice to stretch out the text if it is too short by printing it on egg-box stock?

— Not my practice, particularly. All publishers do it. We are obliged to use this and other means to bring the book up to a proper thickness. You must remember that our prices are not based on the contents of a book but on its size.

— You mention other methods. Would you mind telling us what other methods you use?

— We can expand the letter-press judiciously. We limit the matter to seven words on a page, say, and so get a greater number of pages. We can use large type and can lead considerably.

— But does not that practice hurt the appearance of the page? Make a poor-looking page?

— I am afraid I do not get your meaning.

— I mean to say, is not the page ugly and illegible when you expand the matter to that extent?

— You don't consider the look of a page in making a book. That is a thing that doesn't enter into the production of a book. If I understand you correctly, do you mean to say that it matters how a book looks?

— That was the thought in my mind.

— That's a new idea in book publishing!

— You were speaking of the pressure of industrial conditions since the war. Under these conditions what percentage of the traditions of the craft can you preserve, would you say?

— The traditions of what craft?

— The craft of printing, obviously. What I am trying to get at is this:—There are certain precise and matured standards of workmanship in the printing craft; these standards are the results of experiment through nearly five hundred years. How far are these standards effective under your present-day conditions?

— Those standards, so far as I know anything about them, are what you would call academic. In the first place, book-manufacturing is not a craft, it is a business. As for standards of workmanship — I can understand the term in connection with cabinet-making, for example, or tailoring, but I should not apply the expression to books. You do not talk about the “standards of workmanship” in making soap, do you?

— Then in your mind there does not linger any atmosphere of an art about the making of books?

— When you talk about “atmosphere” you have me out of my depth. There isn’t any atmosphere of art lingering about making soap, is there?

— You would class soap-making with book-making?

— I can see no reason why not.

— May I ask why you were selected by ——— Company to manage their manufacturing department?

— Really, I must say that you overstep the borders —

— Please do not misinterpret my question. It is really pertinent to the inquiry.

— It should certainly be obvious why a man is chosen for a given position. I am employed to earn a satisfactory return on the share-holders’ investment. Is that the information you want?

— I think that is what we want. Would you then consider yourself as happily employed in making soap as in making books?

— Quite as well employed, if making soap paid the dividend.

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— While we are on this subject, may I ask you how you choose the artists who make your illustrations?

— My practice is to select an illustrator whose name is well known.

— Is that the only point you consider?

— I should say, yes. I am not aware of any other reason for spending money on this feature. It is always an uncertain detail and this way of making a choice puts the matter on a safe basis.

— It is sometimes assumed that the illustrations should have a sympathetic bearing on the story. Does not that consideration have some weight with you in choosing your artist?

— None, I should say. You see, the pictures are not really a necessary part of the book. They are a kind of frill that the public has got in the way of expecting, and we have to put them in. Illustrations as a rule stand us as a dead loss unless they are made by a well-known artist. Then, of course, they help sell the book.

## II. MR. MCG.

A. The gentlemen of the committee must remember that the book-publishing business is a gamble. Each new issue, particularly in the department of fiction, is a highly adventurous risk. Our percentage of blanks would astonish you if we dared to state it. But any book may turn out a best-seller. This hope keeps us going. It is absolutely a gamble, as I say. You can see that under these conditions we cannot spend very much money on non-essentials. We have to strip the books down to the barest necessities.

Personally I should like to see the firm put out nothing that is not well designed and well printed. But as

an agent of the firm I have to set aside my personal preferences. The directors are very much down on what they call art.

— Has the firm ever looked into the question of good workmanship as a possible aid to sales?

— Not under the present management. The founder looked at good work as more or less a marketing advantage.

— What do you think caused the present management to change from that opinion?

— They haven't changed. They never had it. They get at the matter from another angle altogether. Their policy is to reduce the production cost to the minimum. The minimum in theory would be reached when the public complained. The public hasn't complained, so you can't tell when to stop cheapening.

You see the directors don't look at a book as a fabricated thing at all. Books are merely something to sell — merchandise. Our management — and all the rest of them, for that matter — come from the selling side of the business and do not have any pride in the product. Old Mr. ——— was a publisher because he liked books. That made an entirely different policy in the old firm, of course.

— To get back to the question of good workmanship helping sales: — Here are two books published abroad to be sold at 50 cents and 80 cents. They can very well be called works of art. Do you not think that these well designed paper covers would stand out among other books and invite customers to themselves?

— Undoubtedly they would.

— Have you ever tried the experiment of putting out editions in paper covers of attractive design?

— Never. It couldn't be done. People wouldn't buy them.

— But you said a moment ago —

— ——— Moreover the difference of cost between cheap cloth sides and paper covers of the kind you have there is so slight that it wouldn't pay to try the experiment.

People want stiff board covers. It doesn't much matter what is inside, but they insist on board covers.

— How do you arrive at that fact?

— Through our salesmen.

— And you say that paper covers have never been tried?

— Never. None of our travellers would go out on the road with a sample in paper covers.

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— A little while ago you said something about your salesmen helping you to an understanding of the public taste. I infer that you get considerable help from this source?

— Most valuable help indeed. We depend entirely on the reports the sales force turns in in these matters. The salesmen are in direct contact with the retailers and are naturally in a position to feel the public pulse, so to speak. Their help is invaluable. They can anticipate the demand very often.

— I had reference more particularly to the way books are made.

— Oh, on that point too. We never make a final decision on a cover design, for instance, without showing it to the salesmen. They very often make valuable suggestions as to changes of colour, etc. They run largely to red.

— It would seem, then, that the designing of the books is very much in the hands of the salesmen?

— Quite in their hands.

— Are the office-boys often called into consultation?

— Mr. ——— finds his stenographer a very great help in passing upon certain points — illustrations, etc.

— Does it appear to you that the sales department would be the one best qualified to pass on points of design?

— Well, there, you see — the books have to be sold — that is what we make them for — and the sales department is the one in closest touch with the people that buy

the books — that knows just what they want.

— The standards of quality, then, are set by the people who buy the books?

— Oh, absolutely so. How else would you move the books? It is a merchandising proposition, you must remember.

— But do you not think that people would buy decently made books as willingly as poorly made books?

— At the same price, yes. No question about it. The book-buying public doesn't worry its head about the way books are made. It doesn't know anything about it. And well made books cost more. The trade is committed to a dollar-and-a-half article and can't risk going above it.

— Your opinion is that the price of a well made book would be so high as to prevent its sale?

— In the case of fiction, yes. The price has become almost a fixture.

— We shall have to go outside of fiction, then, to look for well made books?

— It amounts to that.

— You have said that certain unproductive factors prevent you from spending what you otherwise might on good workmanship. What specific factors would you mention?

— Plates — electros. We plate everything on the chance of its running into several printings. 80 per cent of the books are not reprinted. You can see that the money tied up in plates is a very considerable sum, and, as I say, 80 per cent of it is dead loss. We are obliged to take the chance, however.

— Has any remedy occurred to you?

— If stereotyping could be revived as an accurate process it might help us out. It would cost much less to make and to store paper matrices than to make electrotypes. The difficulty here is that no one knows how to make good stereotypes, and the stereotype plates at their best are more trouble to make ready. Trouble with the press-room, you see.

— Is it possible under good conditions to get satisfac-

tory results from stereotype plates?

— Unquestionably. The books printed from this kind of plates in the first days of the invention are entirely satisfactory.

### III. MR. L.

Q. Can a trade-edition book be well made and sell for \$1.50?

— That depends on how high you set your standard.

— Well, let us not be too rigorous. Can it be made better, say, than this book?

— Beyond question. It will all depend upon whether or not the printer has a few lingering memories of the standards of printing.

— But should not the setting of standards come from the publisher?

— Oh yes, under ideal conditions. Both printer and publisher should have a hand in it.

— How would you make a book of fiction to be sold for \$1.50?

— Well, such a book could have a good title-page as cheaply as a bad one — and the whole typographic scheme would cost no more if it were logically done instead of crudely strung together. By logically done I mean with well proportioned, practicable margins and legible headings, etc. The press-work on books is reasonably good but the “lay-out” or design is entirely neglected. It calls for a little planning, of course, but no more than should be available in any reputable plant. It isn’t so much that these books are badly planned as it is that they are not planned at all.

— But most printing firms have a planning department, do they not?

— The planning in most presses is concerned with the handling of material, not with the *designing* of material. This is no doubt due to the fact that the Taylor System has not yet got around to Aesthetic Efficiency.



— Are not the typographical unions concerned to train their men on these points of design that you mention?

— The unions have only one idea — and it is not concerned with the improvement of printing.

— Are there any trade schools that teach these things? Are not the employers' associations promoting schools to train men in the craft?

— The employers' associations have one idea — a little different from the idea of the unions, perhaps, but not concerned with the improvement of printing. There are trade schools but they teach only the mechanics of the craft.

— Apparently, then, there is no place in this country where one can learn how to design printing?

— You can safely say that there is no such place.

#### IV. MR. A.

Q. What is your own opinion on the subject of illustrations in books?

— In what particular do you mean?

— I mean, do you think that illustrations help or hinder the quality of a book?

— The question is too general to be answered easily. May I ask you to be more specific?

— For example, here is a "best-seller" with several — five or six — half-tone illustrations. Do you consider that these pictures make the book a more complete thing as a specimen of book-making?

— Most certainly not.

— Then would you say that illustrations in such books were a detraction?

— Illustrations such as these, yes. Though it would be hard to detract from this particular book.

— It is a standard book — a standard type of book.

— I fear that it is.

— What kind of illustrations would you favour?

— For many books, none at all. In these books of current fiction the pictures are either futile or else detrimental to the development of the plot. They give the game away, so to speak, when the author may wish to hold the story in suspense. The effort to avoid this disaster accounts for the multitude of undramatic pictures you see in books.

— Your theory of no pictures should appeal to the publishers but I doubt if the illustrators will stand with you.

— Illustration is a trade as well as an art.

— True. But we are trying to limit the inquiry to the artistic side at present. When, then, according to your deductions, would illustrations be called for?

— When they can make a stage-setting for the story. When they ornament it or suggest it, perhaps, instead of reveal it. Impressions and “atmosphere” instead of literal diagrams with a cross marking the spot where, etc.

— But perhaps people like the cross marking the spot where.

— We are limiting the discussion to the artistic side, are we not?

— What about the half-tone process of engraving?

— The process is a way of doing a thing that cannot be done cheaply by any other means.

— Do you consider it a process that adds to the artistic possibilities of book printing?

— You mean according to the standards that prevailed in the earlier days of the craft?

— I do. Yes.

— According to those standards it seems to me that half-tones will always have to be considered as necessities forced upon the book-printer. They demand a kind of paper that is never a satisfactory book-paper. In the case of the kind of books we are talking about the relief line methods have always given the most artistic results, because they are so closely related to the character of type.

One regrets, however, to give up the chances for tonal

designs that the half-tone process provides. Probably the designers and printers will work out a satisfactory relation between half-tones and type when the craze for photographic detail passes a little. As things stand, I should say that the best results are to be had with uncoated book-papers and with line plates. It is true books are rarely illustrated this way — current fiction, I mean — but the method might be used to produce a very attractive and unusual result.

— Then you would condemn the use of half-tones in this kind of books?

— If you mean the usual kind of half-tones printed separately and inserted, I do. But if you are making a book of travel, for example, the half-tones from photographs explain and justify themselves.

But on this whole subject of book illustration it strikes me that if you are to make the design from the start you might as well make it in harmony with the kind of paper and printing you are planning to use, and get all the artistic advantage of fitting your means to your limitations.

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— Are you familiar with the Christy-Holbein Test?

— Yes. That is to say, I have heard of your applying it; and remember that the percentages were very much against Holbein.

— Ninety-three to seven, on an average. How do you explain such a crudity of taste in these groups of people otherwise well educated?

— By the deduction that they are not educated. That is to say that these people, cultivated in other ways, react precisely like savages when confronted with pictures or drawings. They “go for” the tinsel and glitter and are opaque to the higher and more civilized values. They get the most pleasure from drawings that they think they could make themselves. This is the basis of the Eight-year-old Formula widely applied in the department of newspaper comics: “Make your drawing so that it can

be understood by a child eight years old.”

All of this is clearly lack of training, because their taste is good in other matters — music, for example, and house furnishings.

— You would deduce, then, that the periodical and book-publishing industry has failed to train the taste of its public in such matters?

— It has done worse: it has depraved that taste. Because there was, not very long ago, a fine tradition in this country in the line of illustration.

— Why should the publishers find any advantage in depraving the taste of the public — as you say they have done?

— Because they turned their backs on the standards of the publishing business and became merchandisers solely. They had to sell the goods and they had to “sell” a big new public. The quickest way to this public — through flash-and-crash tactics — they adopted. And naturally ran themselves and the public down hill.

— May there not be other sides to it, too? May it not be that the art schools are not now producing draughtsmen of a calibre to support the fine tradition you mention?

— That may have something to do with it. But even that is mixed up with the other. I think that the chief difficulty is with the publishers.

— And the public?

— The public will follow if the publishers lead.

## V. MR. S.

A. Are you not making the mistake of keeping too close to the publishers? It seems to me that you will not get at all the facts behind the situation until you get in touch with the people we sell the books to. *They* are the factors that bring about the conditions you object to. The publisher is merely a machine for selling the public what it wants.

— Then the publisher has no selective function?

— Absolutely none.

— How does the public bring about the condition we object to?

— Obviously by buying the books.

— I mean to say, how does the public prevail upon you to sell it trashy books instead of well made books?

— The public is entirely uneducated on the subject of books, in your sense. People know nothing at all about paper or printing or pictures or things of that sort. One book is as good as another to any educated man so long as he can read it. He doesn't know that there is any such thing as good printing or bad printing or good or bad taste in making books. Under these conditions we should be fools to spend money on features that do not have any bearing on sales. It's a simple business proposition.

— Would the public that you are discussing buy well made books as willingly as trashy books?

— Oh, absolutely. It's the books they are interested in — what they contain, not how they are made. They wouldn't know the difference.

## VI. MR. G.

A. What's the use of talking about standards in connection with things like these? These are not books. They aren't fit to wad a gun with. I wouldn't have them in the house. Nobody pays any attention to stuff like that.

There isn't what you would call a book on the table, except this one, perhaps. That's printed in England and sent over in sheets and bound on this side. But that one is set in a bastard Caslon. It isn't the original Caslon but a revision with the descenders cut off. See how he's got his O upside down!

Those others — what's the use of talking about them at all? It reminds me of the story about the Chinaman —

— But, Mr. ———, do you not think it possible to get

up this class of books in a manner that would suit you better?

— You can't hope to get anything like a decent book until you do away with the damnable cheap paper and the vile types. And then you will have to start in and teach the printer how to print. There aren't more than a half a dozen presses in the country that know how to print. Most printing looks like it had been done with apple-butter on a hay-press —

— What you say is unhappily true. What we are trying to find out are the causes of this state of things.

— The causes are everywhere — all through the rattle-trap, cheap-jack, shoddy work that is being done in every kind of trade. Nobody cares for making decent things any more.

The only cure is to get back to decent standards of workmanship in everything again. But the case seems to me to be hopeless. I try to do printing up to a decent standard — and that is about all any of us can do. I don't believe you can hope to do much good through your societies and investigations. I believe in each one doing his own job in the best way he knows how. That's the only way you can raise the standard. It's the work you turn out that counts.

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

**T**WO main questions resulting from the Inquiry present themselves to the Committee. The first question is: — Is it within the power of the Society of Calligraphers, of any society, or of Society itself, to restore to the printing of books a standard of good work? The second and major question: — Are books necessary to the present social state?

I. When the Committee began its work it assumed as a matter of course that the established standards of printing would serve it as guide-posts and criteria. It expected to traverse a country where the highways were in need of repair, perhaps, and the marks of direction dim, but on the whole a negotiable country. It found a very different state of things.

Instead of roads to be followed with some excusable discomfort it found not even trails. Such highways as had once been charted were obliterated. Not only guide-posts but the most elementary blaze-marks were overgrown and lost beyond any hope of recovery. Instead of following the planned course of visit and consultation the Committee was forced to reorganize itself into an expedition of discovery. It has been fortunate to return at all.

The collected data of the exploration can lead to but one conclusion: That the whole fabric of Standards of Workmanship will have to be rebuilt from the beginning. Whether this can be done under the present state of society is a matter to be discussed in connection with the second question.

II. Are books necessary to the present social state? The Committee's finding is, unanimously and conclusively, No.

During the past twenty years many influences have been at work to wean mankind from the use of books. Automobiles, the motion-picture drama, professional athletics, the Saturday Evening Post — these operated even before the Great War to discourage the habit of reading. Since the war the progress of society — culminating, in America, in the dictatorship of the proletariat — has effectually completed the process. Books as an element vital to the welfare of the race have been eliminated.

The Society of Calligraphers is thus freed at one stroke from the obligations implied in the first question. But there are still books in existence, and for these the Committee feels a professional concern. For the Investigation, if it has done nothing else, has disclosed one most cogent and ineluctable fact: that wherever there is contact between books and the public, the effect upon the books is deleterious.

So far as the immediate situation is concerned, the public, by discontinuing the contact, has obviated the danger. But in a period of revolution no condition can be taken for granted as fixed. It is quite within the range of possibility that the public, under compulsion, may turn again to books and reading; and this, the Committee believes, is a contingency the Society should be prepared to meet.

Publishers as a group promise, for the immediate future, to be an harassed and unimpressionable body. Influence upon them can be brought to bear only through public demand. Should a public demand for books revive, it will be imperative for the Society either to quench it altogether—a project which the Committee has discarded as visionary — or to take it in hand at its inception and give it constructive shape by forcing upon public attention such knowledge of the more elementary points of good taste as shall make impossible the further prostitution of standards. As the most direct means to this end it is urgently recommended by the Committee that the Society take up at once the study of advertising.















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