Robert L. Shep. Cleaning & Repairing Books

Sidney F. Huttner
Book Review


Reviewed by Sidney F. Huttner, Head of the George Arents Research Library at Syracuse University

We live in the age of the self-publisher, *Caveat emptor*. The notion that one can become instantly wealthy--or at least develop a substantial second income--by taking a tabloid ad, renting a post box, preparing a document that speaks from priceless personal experience, and settling back to enjoy orders from thousands of eager buyers is pushed at us in virtually every magazine and newspaper we pick up. The process has been packaged. The practitioners are legion. The ads that sell the idea do not remind us quite so frequently that we use at our own risk the advice we thus buy. In a period when the role of authority, government and otherwise, is being reduced systematically, we must, from time to time, remind ourselves,

Those who favor throwing the individual on his own resources, and who are willing to accept the results of their position, will find nothing more remarkable in this book than the sheer quantity of bad advice, poor or faulty grammar, and plain silliness it contains. Those who still find meaning in the concepts of right and duty will ponder also whether labeling a book "practical," urging experimentation on "throw-away 'practice' books," and warning frequently to take care to not damage rare or valuable books, really gives license to publish from the top of one's head, without benefit of serious study or research; without "practical" editing; without, one wants to say, thought. Does not the mere fact of print still inescapably convey authority and therefore the act of publishing responsibility?

It is, then, difficult to know what to do with this contribution to the cosmetics of the old book Mr. Shep offers us, As described on the wrapper text he is "a noted book dealer and appraiser of libraries in the fields of Performing Arts and Textiles, and has been cleaning and repairing books for the last 15 years. He has also taught a number of students, and does repair work for art museums and libraries." His pervasive fear of mold may be the result of operations based in Puget Sound. One does not want to be unkind to someone obviously well-intentioned, but those who take his book seriously deserve, in the phrase, it. Books, had they legs, would be running.

Advice: "I really should have pointed out earlier that when you find names and signatures in books, you must determine whether or not you should leave them there. Obviously, in the case of 'Robin age 8,' [sic] there is no socially redeeming value in leaving it; but in the case of 'Ben Franklin,' [sic] it would be very undesirable to remove it." (page 29)

Or, again, on rust stains: "These are usually caused by staples or paper clips. There are several approaches to this problem, and none of them is a sure thing. You can try a light sanding to see if
that will lift it. You can try Liquid Paper in a shade matching the paper, but it will probably show. You can try hydrogen peroxide applied with an eye dropper or a glass rod, very carefully; make sure you blot up the excess. Potassium permanganate will also remove rust, but it is very tricky to use and you have to be very, very careful with it." (page 64)

Research: The chapter titled "Tools and Supplies + Some Sources" recommends Elmer's Glue-All (not without reservation: Atwood Resin Book Paste #1100, Norbond Liquid Plastic Adhesive, and Jade #403 are also mentioned), Energine Spot Remover (since carbon tetrachloride is no longer available), rubber cement thinner, and a cooked cornstarch paste, "A couple of drops of thymol can be added to the container of any of your adhesives to help prevent mildew in the book." (page 17) No mention of health or safety hazards (here or elsewhere). A short list of suppliers ends with the observation: "You can probably deal with any of the above firms through the mail." (page 23) One wonders what delay in publication would have been occasioned by a check with each of the nine firms listed.

Writing: "Replacing flyleafs, or flys, is to my way of thinking really a subject for a bookbinding class. I was reluctant to include it at all, but when I thought about it I realized that it was really worth explaining how this is done. [new paragraph] Many of my attitudes towards books changed as soon as I learned how to replace flys. I used to avoid books which had the free fly torn out, or books where the flys were clipped or really messed up. [new paragraph] Now, instead of looking at books of this type as a problem, I just look at them as a lot of work!!! " (page 75) The 12-page chapter on this subject does make clear why.

Discrimination: "The paper I use is a handmade charcoal or watercolor paper which can be found in pads at any good artists' supply store, Strathmore is a good one to look for. If you have any doubts as to whether or not it is handmade, ask the person who works in the store." (page 76)

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