

## One Returned to the Fold, Four Newly Added, and Then Some

Many years ago I wrote a little piece entitled “A Passionate Publisher & A Collector’s Zeal.” Included within that piece was a little subsection headed “When Collectors Turn Friends.” Back in the early 1990’s I succumbed to an entreaty to sell a little Mosher book, Oscar Wilde’s *Poems in Prose* (1906) which included six prose poems reprinted from *The Fortnightly Review* for July 1894. It’s from the Ideal Series of Little Masterpieces with its Constance Karlake binding design taken from *The Bindings of Tomorrow—A Record of the Work of the Guild of Women-Binders and the Hampstead Bindery* (London, 1902, entry 6). What made the little volume of particular interest was that each of its pages was hand-illuminated by Clara Chipman Newton.\*

The multi-talented artist, Clara Chipman Newton (1848-1936), was secretary of Rockwood Pottery in Cincinnati and one of the firm’s first decorators. As a member of the Arts & Crafts movement and with her being closely associated with America’s premier art pottery makers, Newton’s illumination work here represents a unique conjunction of the Arts & Crafts movement, the revival of printing in America, and the revival of the art of illumination which the Arts & Crafts movement rejuvenated from the medieval art form then popularized in the later nineteenth century. This was the artist who decorated the *Poems in Prose*, and this was the book I mistakenly sold. I never forgot it, nor did I ever give up in trying to re-acquire it.

Eventually all things change, especially after twenty some years. Through a series of email exchanges I found out that the collection which housed the Newton was going to be transferred to a new home—a university. The owner needed the room to free up space for new acquisitions. This was my time to speak up or forever hold my peace, so I visited the collection and its owner and we discussed what was transpiring. I brought up the subject of the illuminated *Poems in Prose*. I was asked what I’d give for the volume and presented a figure double that of which was originally paid to me. A surprisingly quick response rejected that offer, but just as quickly laid on the table was a new one of 2 ½ times what I originally sold it for. I didn’t think. I didn’t hesitate. I didn’t take time to consider, and I certainly didn’t have the money at the time, but I agreed almost instantly. Too much time had elapsed during which I thought about that little volume and my original mistake in selling it. Too many times I was reminded of the “wish I hadn’t...” and “damn, I shouldn’t have done that...” It was now or never, and I chose *now*. That day we parted with the understanding that I’d send the owner an IOU and pay the book off as soon as I could see my way clear, and I actually left with the little

volume safely tucked into my computer case.

When I look back over all of this and what had transpired over the past twenty plus years, I couldn't help but feel that a special personal significance had now been attached to the illuminated volume. I so clearly remember when in the late 1980's "Joel," then recently departed from Second Story Books and the fellow who bought the book at Waverly Auctions, had brought the little volume to my living room and laid it on top of the piano. I remember looking at the illuminator's name but not recognizing it, and the days of googling were not yet afforded us (boy, do I ever feel like an old codger). Only later after selling the book did I come to know the illuminator's significance. Of course by then it was too late. Now, looking back over things, I'm kind of glad that my friend did buy the book and had many years knowing it was part of his collections which are extensive, to say the least. Since his Mosher books were soon to be transferred to other quarters, I was pleased to have had the opportunity to re-acquire it, and now it rest on that shelf specially reserved for illuminated copies of The Mosher Books--back to the fold. But every time I look at it, I am reminded of my friend, and so that added significance will continue as a tribute to him and our relationship over the years.

### Four Newly Added...

One area of focus has been to assemble a large sampling of the books from Mosher's personal library which carry his bookplate. Beyond that, I'm always on the prowl for the actual copies Mosher used to produce his own publication by the same title. All of the following have come from the same source, a little bookstore which for years had these volumes on its shelves. I only just discovered it and I'm having a heck of a good time working with the owner who keeps finding more.

The first is a set of volumes, not much to look at, but which nevertheless are quite pleasing, each bearing Mosher's bookplate. The work is Thomas Hardy's *The Dynasts—A Drama of the Napoleonic Wars*, In Three Parts, Nineteen Acts, & One Hundred and Thirty Scenes. Three volumes. (New York and London: The Macmillan Company, 1904-1908). Very nice, but Mosher didn't publish much of Hardy, in fact, practically nothing except for a few of his lines on George Meredith.

The second is far more exciting. It's an oblong volume: Mosher's copy of Maurice Hewlett's *A Masque of Dead Florentines* with illustrations by J. D. Batten (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1895). The volume is in fine condition and Mosher used this very copy to produce his reprint in *The Bibelot* and in his Venetian Series. In *The Bibelot* he ends his introduction saying "we reprint the text of A Masque of Dead Florentines in its entirety. As Mr. Batten's illustrations do not lend

*themselves to satisfactory reproduction they have been omitted. With the lapse of time it is unlikely that this thin oblong quarto will lose value either in the eyes of the collector or the lover of poetry for its own sake.*”--Vol. X (1904), pp. [i-iv] (N. B.: Mosher’s *Bibelot* Introductions are always in italics) Furthermore, Mosher describes the book in his “Bibliographical Note” on p. 52. What a wonderful feeling it is to have the very book in hand which the publisher used to produce his own set of publications. So, another one is added to the pile of original source texts for the Mosher Press publications. Yes!

Now we move to the third, that being another of Maurice Hewlett’s publications, but even more exciting than the preceding volume. This is Hewlett’s first book, *Earthwork out of Tuscany: Being Impressions and Translations*. (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1895). This original volume contains not only Mosher’s notes, but also the record of how he acquired it with the help of Mitchell Kennerley, including offerings from The Torch Press Book Shop of Cedar Rapids, Iowa; and DeWitt & Snelling of Oakland, California which described to Mosher their “beautiful clean copy of the actual first edition” which “does not appear to have ever been read.” The book was offered for \$20 and on the reverse side of their note they provide Mosher with complete bibliographic details. Oh good lord, be still my heart. Mosher’s Introduction to his reprint of two selections from the book in *The Bibelot*, Vol. V (1899), pp. pp. [237] to [272] also explains why he decided to use the true first edition over the London 1899 edition which was “shorn of its earlier simplicity” in his estimation. In 1911 Mosher reprinted the entire book as we see and read it in this first edition. His mostly bibliographical Foreword points out that “the First Edition (Fcap 8vo. Pp xii: 1-180) contains between *Proem* and *Envoy* fifteen essays which form the basis of our present reprint *verbatim et literatim*.” He differentiates between the true first London edition which is one of five hundred copies only in England, and that of the same book with the further imprint information of “New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons” and with a certificate that reads: “Limited to five hundred copies for sale in *England and America*.” I am also totally struck by the close similarity between the size and color of the bindings and the use of the same photogravure frontispiece portrait of a lady’s head and upper body by Botticelli. Much more could be written about why Mosher chose this first edition to reprint rather than the second or third edition, but in the spirit of brevity I’ll let it stand at this.

Another fine addition is that of a Vale Press book in fine condition, the title being Michael Field’s *Julia Domna—A Play*, one of 240 copies sold by Hacon & Ricketts and Mr. John Lane, 1903. Mosher never printed anything from it, but he did amass a collection of Vale Press publications, some of which were the impetus for his own version of the title and some of which he highly criticized. This title

from Mosher's private library is now added to several others I have.

The "...and then some" as indicted in the title of the overall essay. Well they include a rather eccentric yet attractive fully tooled leather binding on the Vest Pocket Series title of Robert Louis Stevenson's *An Apology for Idlers and Other Essays* (1905), several books given by Mosher to members of his family including a copy of his *Polonius* (1901" inscribed "To my dear Mosher, / from her old and / affectionate son / T.B.M. / Oct. 18, 1901" and a copy of *The Celestial Country* (privately printed, 1922) with a hand-written letter to Mosher's sister and the whole being covered by a homemade dust-jacket with the note written on the front: "Amoret, keep this book for your children. The note attached to fly leaf explains the publishing and the gift, to your grandmother Elizabeth Mosher Cowan, by her brother Thos. B. Mosher. S. C. C." There's more, but this has got to end shortly, so I'm calling it a day and may pick up on some of the others in another essay next *Endpapers*.

\*Anyone can see some of it's sample pages by googling using these words: Clara Chipman Newton illuminated. You then just have to click on what more than likely will be the first choice presented and you'll be able to see eight double-page openings. For more information on her, the reader may wish to access the book *Clara Chipman Newton: A Memorial Tribute* (Cincinnati: Privately printed, 1938), a copy of which is found at UD's Morris Library.

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