

A bibliophile's letter from Great Britain

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A BIBLIOPHILE'S LETTER FROM GREAT BRITAIN

1959 has been another year of excitement and activity for the bibliophile in Britain, tempered for many by the news of the death of Sir Walter Greg, who died in March. Greg's major contribution to bibliography was in the field of English drama, culminating in the "Bibliography of the English printed drama to the Restoration". He founded the Malone Society and compiled the impressive "Shakespeare First Folio".

Auctions were dominated by the Dyson Perrins Sale at Sotheby's on 9 December 1958, when a 12th-century German Gospels sold for £39,000—a sale-room record—and a 13th-century French Bestiary for £36,000. In April a very interesting collection of Napoleon I autograph letters and documents were auctioned, also at Sotheby's. One autograph letter written at St. Helena fetched £310 and many other fascinating items found new homes. Rare flower books are still rising in collectors' estimation: April sales in London emphasised this trend both at Hodgson's, where Martyn's "Historia plantarum rararum" (1728) brought £480, and at Sotheby's, where Lawrance's "Roses" (1799) brought £650, and the seven-volume "British Flower Garden" (1823-38) £110. A June sale at Sotheby's saw the disposal to an American dealer of an important collection of Henry James letters for £2,400.

Exhibitions at the National Book League in London were again well attended. The second Antiquarian Book Fair finished on 2 May, after a successful period of contact between book-collectors and the trade. Like the Private Libraries Association, with its category of associate membership for booksellers, the National Book League is actively assisting the collector to find the firms which will help him. Many rare and

beautiful books were on show at Albemarle Street—I noticed particularly MS. poems by Dylan Marlais Thomas and a Dutch "Biblia Pauperum" about 1460. Inexplicably, some booksellers do not support this Fair: my enquiries have failed to elicit a reason.

University College, London, held a Centenary Exhibition of A.E. Housman's MSS. and books this year. The exhibition was largely arranged by John Carter, Housman's bibliographer, and it was he too who compiled and annotated the fine catalogue.

Another exhibition to achieve widespread publicity was the permanent "Museum of the Alphabet", officially opened in June. This museum has been built up in his garden at 50, St. Barnabas Road, Cambridge, by Dr. David Diringer, the author of the standard work "The Alphabet". A new edition will be published by Faber and Faber shortly; this edition is extensively revised and much enlarged—Dr. Reinhold Regensburger, also of Cambridge, has collaborated with Dr. Diringer in this great work. I was invited to a preview of the Museum several months before the official opening, and can only recommend every student of calligraphy, epigraphy, palaeography, in fact history itself, to make the journey to Cambridge. The Museum is open to all research workers and students.

So many important books are published in Britain every year, that a bibliophile is compelled to make a personal choice: I shall confine myself to three books. First, David Bland's "History of Book Illustration" (cf. "Librarum" I/1959), published by Faber and Faber, perhaps the British publishing firm most conscious of the book arts. This beautifully illustrated work is technically sound and itself a production

illustrating Mr. Bland's *dicta*; it costs only four guineas. Another Faber and Faber publication of great significance, small in format though it is, is John Mason's "Paper-making as an artistic craft", illustrated by Rigby Graham, and costing only 18/-. The revolution of machine-made paper for newsprint was of no more universal interest than are the experiments now taking place in Leicester, where Mason is working. His book has the startling addition: "with a note on nylon paper". He uses fibres from "nettles, cow-parsley, rushes, the stalks and leaves of gladiolus and iris, coloured threads and, latest of all, nylon and terylene fibres". Like all revolutionary techniques, Mason's work is at the outset being conducted on a modest scale, but there would appear to be little doubt that eventually many new substances will be used to produce durable and attractive paper. For those interested, Messrs. Maggs of London have produced a limited number of specimen paper-books. John Mason's lecture "The Twelve-by-Eight", an account of his small mill, was published on his own paper by the Private Libraries Association, but this is now out of print. The lecture also appeared, however, in "The Private Library" in January, and this issue is still available from the Association, Parkfield Crescent, North Harrow, Middlesex, England.

The third recent book that I have chosen is the Golden Cockerel Press' "Metamorphoses of Publius Ovidius Naso", being the Augustans' text of 1717. The two editions cost 8 and 15 guineas respectively. Textually the book is not altogether satisfactory, omitting a number of quite celebrated passages. Bound by Mansells, "The Metamorphoses" are printed in Caslon on Millbourn mould-made paper; they are superbly illustrated. In Britain, the collectors of private press books are declining in numbers, if not in discrimination, and there is a consequent post-war rise in the number of amateurs engaged in private press book production since the demise of the estab-

lished major presses. There is, however, no publication listing the books issued by the hundreds of amateurs all over the world, and it is with considerable pleasure that librarians, the book trade, and collectors themselves have greeted the announcement of "Private Press Books", an annual bibliography to appear first in Spring 1960. It will be edited by Roderick and Thomas Rae, both themselves private press owners, and published by the Private Libraries Association.

Apart from new books, a number of new periodicals devoted to literature and the graphic arts have appeared for the first time within the last two or three years. "Motif, a journal of the visual arts", for example, is finely-produced every four months by the Shenval Press—the same firm that prints "The Book Collector". The editor is Ruari McLean, and the contents of the first two issues include wood-engravings by Joan Hassall, an article on Jean de Tournes, and contributions by Helmut Gernsheim, Lynton Lamb, and Edward Ardizzone. More specialised is "Book Design and Production", a quarterly printed by Benhams, edited by James Moran. Since the first issue in Spring 1958, this periodical has steadily improved in format and content, and is now the most respected journal in the printing trade. Among magazines devoted to pure literature, "John O'London's" had a high reputation for middle-brow reviews for half a century. Now it returns, with Ernest Kay as the new editor, from a new publisher. Appearing weekly from October 8th, it is as reliable a guide to current British books as was its predecessor.

Recent author bibliographies of international importance include Geoffrey Keynes' "Bibliography of Dr. John Donne", whose third edition (of only 750 copies) was published in 1958 by Cambridge University Press, and John Sullivan's "G. K. Chesterton: a bibliography". Sullivan's work appears shortly after Patrick Cahill's on Belloc and is almost as well-done. The

real fault is his omission of all Chesterton's journalism, which is practically as important as his boosk. Such an omission appears to me to be indefensible, even though it is intentional.

The bibliography of Robert Louis Stevenson continues on its laborious way, volume four of the Reinecke catalogue having been published last year by Yale University Library. This volume contains letters to and about Stevenson, and appears in an edition of only 500 copies. The compiler of this vast catalogue, George L. McKay, is the author of a related pamphlet entitled "Some Notes on R. L. Stevenson, his Finances and his Agents and Publishers".

The Mitchell Library in Glasgow has one of the most comprehensive Burns collections in the world, rivalling that of the British Museum and certainly surpassing that in the Alloway cottage. The "Catalogue of the Robert Burns Collection in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow" is thus extremely valuable. It was published earlier this year by Glasgow Public Libraries for 21/-.

Co-operation has already been touched on in this short letter from Britain: co-operation between collector and bookseller. Nothing is more satisfying than a lifelong friendship with a bookseller who is interested in your library and helps you to build it up over the years. But the co-operation

between collector and collector is more necessary; for example Robert Louis Stevenson enthusiasts and specialists on the history of the film have already their own groups or societies in England and such specialist societies are becoming very popular. One of the functions of the Private Libraries Association is indeed to foster such co-operation and the establishment of minority circles, but its larger object has been the co-operation of general collectors by an Exchange Scheme for the disposal and acquisition of books. I am writing this letter at the time when this Scheme—still unique in the world—reaches its fifth year of activity, after having handled many thousands of books and periodicals. I myself edited "The Exchange List" for a period before it was taken over by another professional librarian, J. D. Lee of Sheffield, Yorkshire. The Exchange Scheme is the only way in which collectors can advertise their wants directly to others, and dispose of books which they no longer require to other members in need of them, through a central clearing-house. The Scheme has always been open to book collectors in all parts of the world, and it is less than fitting to give an account of its work in this fifth year of international co-operation among book-collectors.

APHORISMEN

In einem guten Buche stehen mehr Wahrheiten, als sein Verfasser hineinzuschreiben meinte.

Künstler, was du nicht schaffen muß, das darfst du nicht schaffen wollen.

Jeder Dichter und alle ehrlichen Dilettanten schreiben mit ihrem Herzblute; aber wie diese Flüssigkeit beschaffen ist, darauf kommt es an.

Die verstehen sehr wenig, die nur das verstehen, was sich erklären läßt.

Der Ruhm der kleinen Leute heißt Erfolg.

Der Charakter des Künstlers ernährt oder verzehrt sein Talent.

Manuskripte vermodern im Schranke oder reifen darin.

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach