

THE BAILLIE COLLECTION OF BOOKPLATES

WILLIAM E. BAILLIE of Bridgeport, Connecticut, has recently presented to the Museum the collection of bookplates which he has spent more than a score years bringing together. Containing approximately twenty-five thousand items, the collection long has been known to collectors of *ex libris* as one of the largest and most important ever formed in this country. About half are American and were made prior to 1850, the series of colonial plates being unusually rich and including many of the more celebrated and rarer items. There are over five thousand English plates, most of them of the eighteenth century and many of the seventeenth. The European continental plates are fewer in number than any of the other categories, but among them is a considerable number of the earlier and artistically most important plates ever made. Of recent and contemporary American and English work, the collection contains long runs by most of the more prominent designers and engravers.

It is obviously impossible within the proper limits of a BULLETIN article to give any detailed account of the collection—as mere naming of the noteworthy items would require much more space than is available. It is hoped, however, that from time to time it will be possible to call attention in these pages to various aspects of the collection and to bring out the importance of particular groups of material embraced within it. In the mean time the barest notice of a few of the items which a hurried examination of this great mass of material has brought to light must suffice.

Of prime importance are such plates as that used to mark the books presented to the Monastery of Buxheim by Hilprand Brandenburg of Biberach about 1475. Certainly one of the earliest bookplates and long considered to be the first, it bears somewhat the same relation to the bookplate in general that the Mazarin Bible does to other books, with this further qualification that just as it is one of the most important of all so is it one of the

most charming. Then there is the woodcut *ex libris* designed by Albrecht Dürer for Willibald Pirckheimer, and to support it those of Scheurl-Tucher and Hector Pömer, both formerly attributed to Dürer, but now known to have been designed by Wolf Traut and Hans Sebald Beham. There are also several of the remarkably brilliant little engraved plates by the brothers Hans Sebald and Barthel Beham, and a series by such other later sixteenth-century German designers as Jost Amman, Virgil Solis, Mathias Zundt, and Lucas Kilian. The influence of these plates on recent English and American work has been very great, a number of these that are to be seen here, for instance, having come from the collection of Charles H. Sherborn, who himself was doubtless the best known of modern English bookplate engravers.

The English seventeenth-century plates are of peculiar interest, as it was not until toward the end of that century that the use of the bookplate became prevalent among the British gentry. Without going further, the quality of this group may be vouched for by the fact that it contains the plate engraved by Michael Burghers for Thomas Gore, Bishop Hackett's plate by Faithorne, one of the Marriott plates, and all five of the Samuel Pepys plates.

When one comes to the eighteenth century in England it becomes difficult to select any particular ones for notice but perhaps it may suffice to call attention to the plates of Ann Damer, John Holland (by Hogarth), William Ayton (by Edwards and Hall), Sir Foster Cunliffe (by Bartolozzi), Henry Maister—one would like to go on calling the roll, but time is short.

The array of American plates and labels is simply bewildering, there being about thirteen thousand of them, a number which by itself would suffice to put the collection in the small number of very important ones. Many of these are, so far as known, unique, and more of them are to be considered among the incunabula of American engraving. Of course the George Washington plate—in the eyes of the patriotic collector the most desirable of all—is among them. But it is not alone, for it is present not only in an original contempor-

ary impression, but in one of the notorious restrikes, and in several of the even more notorious forgeries and copies. Beside these there are many of the Nathaniel Hurd plates, Hurd having apparently been the first American to engrave a bookplate, and those by such other noted early American engravers as, for instance, Paul Revere, Maverick, Dawkins, and Doolittle. Even there is a group of the plates by the notorious forger and convict Brunton whose work looms so large in the annals of early Connecticut engraving. But to continue would be wearisome to all but the most reckless and hardened reader of catalogues.

The bookplate is something which has been collected and studied only within comparatively recent years and there seems still to be something of the misunderstanding about it that usually accompanies any new activity of the collector. But happily they have by now, in spite of malice and incredulity, arrived at a stage where their devotees need neither defense nor apology—even the littlest time spent in running through such a collection as this should convert any one of even the most moderate sensibility to the charm and the pleasure that they so amply provide. Leaving entirely aside all the fascinating problems in history, family and general, which they both raise and enlighten, forgetting the often delicate and beautiful designs in which they abound, and discarding for whatever reason one chooses the very human joy of tracking the rarity to its lair, the bookplate when seen in gross as here provides one of the most charming and delightful commentaries upon human nature that one could possibly desire. Few things are quite so close to a man as his books, and nothing about them is quite so personal to him as the marks of ownership that he deliberately chooses to paste within their covers. As is known to all those who have ever examined their minds preparatory to getting a bookplate for themselves, its choice and selection—since once affixed it is something that like the brand of Cain can never be effaced—is matter for the most mature consideration, the deliberate assumption of a mark that will live for

ages after one, so sure an indication of character and so infallible an index to personality that, indeed, many people, and among them of the bravest, never quite summon courage to give such hostages to fortune.

There is the bookplate armorial—one wonders are all men born equal or do they merely assume it?—and the bookplate pictorial, with all its little solemnities and parades, its humor and the lack of it—and best of all the bookplate sententious and



BOOKPLATE OF HECTOR PÖMER
CUT BY HANS SEBALD BEHAM
GERMAN, 1500-1550

emblematical, the happiest hunting ground for those whose motto is the psalmist's "Know thyself." (Was it the psalmist's really? It doesn't sound right. But then bookplates by the thousand do such queer things to one!) Here grows at its most luxuriant the tell-tale pride of mind and earthly wealth, for never elsewhere were Ossa and Pelion so jumbled up, or the follies and stupidities of men so made piquant through unwitting close-packed epigram. From Pirckheimer's fine "sibi et amicis" through Garrick's, at best polite, quotation from a book of second-handed wit, "La première chose qu'on doit faire quand on a

emprunté un livre, c'est de le lire afin de pouvoir le rendre plutôt," to the reference to Matthew XXV, 9, "Go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves," the attitude of the owner is expressed in all its variants, from noblest generosity to a mere churlishness, which is all too seldom enlivened by the wit that twisted the parable of the foolish virgins to its purposes.

The man who puts his face and figure on his plate, seeking remembrance through tenacity of glue, is always with us, smirking, strutting, under cover of a better man, first cousin to the man whose plate is piled with books and prints on which we read "The Hundred Guilders" and "First Folio, 1632." But side by side with this we find the scholar's sad and disillusioned "En apprenant mourant" and Bewick's sweetly sentimental "My books the silent friends of joy and woe." The mottoes that men choose! Were one in sporting mood, to seek the story of old Grouse one would not turn to gunrooms but to bookplates—where the deadly commonplace, enlarged and glorified and given human value, is spelled at length for men to read and marvel at. Just think of picking some one phrase to travel down the ages with, to see each time one turns the cover of one's book—it much reminds

one of the miner in the Golden Butterfly who saved on time by having prayers engrossed and stuck above his bed, and then each night, the candle out, as covers were pulled up would jerk his thumb and mutter, "Them's my sentiments." Where men in life admit a sense of humor in themselves and little else, with Bartlett's aid they spill their inner souls upon their bookplates for the world to know. Can we not see the stout and portly gentleman who having toiled and thought and analyzed his soul and social state and worn the pages of his crib, gave heed unto "Judicimur agendo" on another's plate and placed in all solemnity upon his own "Magnanimus esto"? Doubtless like that other he possessed a "Mens sibi conscia recti," and was certain of the truth that lies in "Virtus sibi munus." One wonders at the vast amount of Latin in the bookplate (of some, one knows the owners!) and one aches to think of how hard used that last appendix in the dictionary was, of Latin tags compiled to pepper common speech with easy elegance.

Montaigne has given the proper word—nos folies sont nos sagesses. Would one really know a man, consult not Dunn or Bradstreet, but find his plate.

W. M. I., JR.



AMERICAN BOOKPLATES

GEORGE WASHINGTON, ENGRAVER UNKNOWN; JAMES WILSON, ENGRAVED PROBABLY BY NATHANIEL HURD; WILLIAM WETMORE, ENGRAVED BY PAUL REVERE