

BOOK-PLATES

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Book-Plates by W. J. Hardy

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W. J. HARDY

BOOK-PLATES



Book-Plates

By
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London

Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.

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Preface

HAVING vindicated in my introductory chapter the practice of collecting book-plates from the charge of flagrant immorality, I do not think it necessary to spend many words in demonstrating that it is in every way a worthy and reasonable pursuit, and one which fully deserves to be made the subject of a special treatise in a series of *Books about Books*. If need were, the Editor of the series, who asked me to write this little hand-book, would perhaps kindly accept his share of responsibility, but in the face of the existence of a flourishing 'ex libris' Society, the importance of the book-plate as an object of collection may almost be taken as axiomatic. My own interest in this particular hobby is of long standing, and happily the appearance, when my manuscript was already at the printer's, of Mr. Egerton Castle's pleasantly written and profusely illustrated work on *English Book-Plates* has relieved me of the dreaded necessity of writing an additional chapter on those modern examples, in treating of

which neither my knowledge nor my enthusiasm would have equalled his.

The desire to possess a book-plate of one's own is in itself commendable enough, for in fixing the first copy into the first book the owner may surely be assumed to have registered a vow that he or she at least will not join the great army of book-persecutors—men and women who cannot touch a volume without maltreating it, and who, though they are often ready to describe the removal of a book-plate even from a worthless volume as an act of vandalism, do infinitely more harm to books in general by their ruthless handling of them. No doubt, also, the decay of interest in heraldry, which is mainly responsible for the eccentricities of modern 'fancy' examples, has taken from us the temptation to commit certain sins which were at one time attractive. Our ancestors, for instance, may sometimes have outraged the susceptibilities of the heralds by using as book-plates coats-of-arms to which they had no title. Yet their offence against the College of Arms was trivial when compared with the outrage upon common-sense committed by the mystical young man of to-day, who designs, or has designed for him, an 'emblematic' book-plate, or a 'symbolic' book-plate, or a 'theoretic' book-plate, in which the emblem, or the symbol, or the theory, is far too

mystical for any ordinary comprehension, and needs, in fact, a lengthy explanation, which, however, I am bound to confess, is always very willingly given by either owner or designer, if asked for.

It is, perhaps, needless to say that I am very far from including all modern book-plates under this condemnation. The names of the artists—Sir John Millais, Mr. Stacy Marks, Randolph Caldecott, Mr. Walter Crane, Miss Kate Greenaway, and others—who have found time to design, some of them only one, some quite a considerable number of really interesting marks of ownership, suffice to rescue modern book-plates from entire discredit. Here and there, too, a little-known artist, like the late Mr. Winter of Norwich, has produced a singularly fine plate. Above all, the strikingly beautiful work of Mr. Sherborn, as seen in the book-plates of the Duke of Westminster, in that of Mr. William Robinson, and in many other fine examples, forms a refreshing oasis in the desert of wild eccentricity. But the most ardent admirer of modern book-plates cannot pretend that amid the multiplicity of recent examples any school or style is observable, and as I have aimed at giving in this little hand-book an historic sketch, however unpretentious, of the different styles adopted in designing book-plates from their first introduction, I hope I may be excused for not