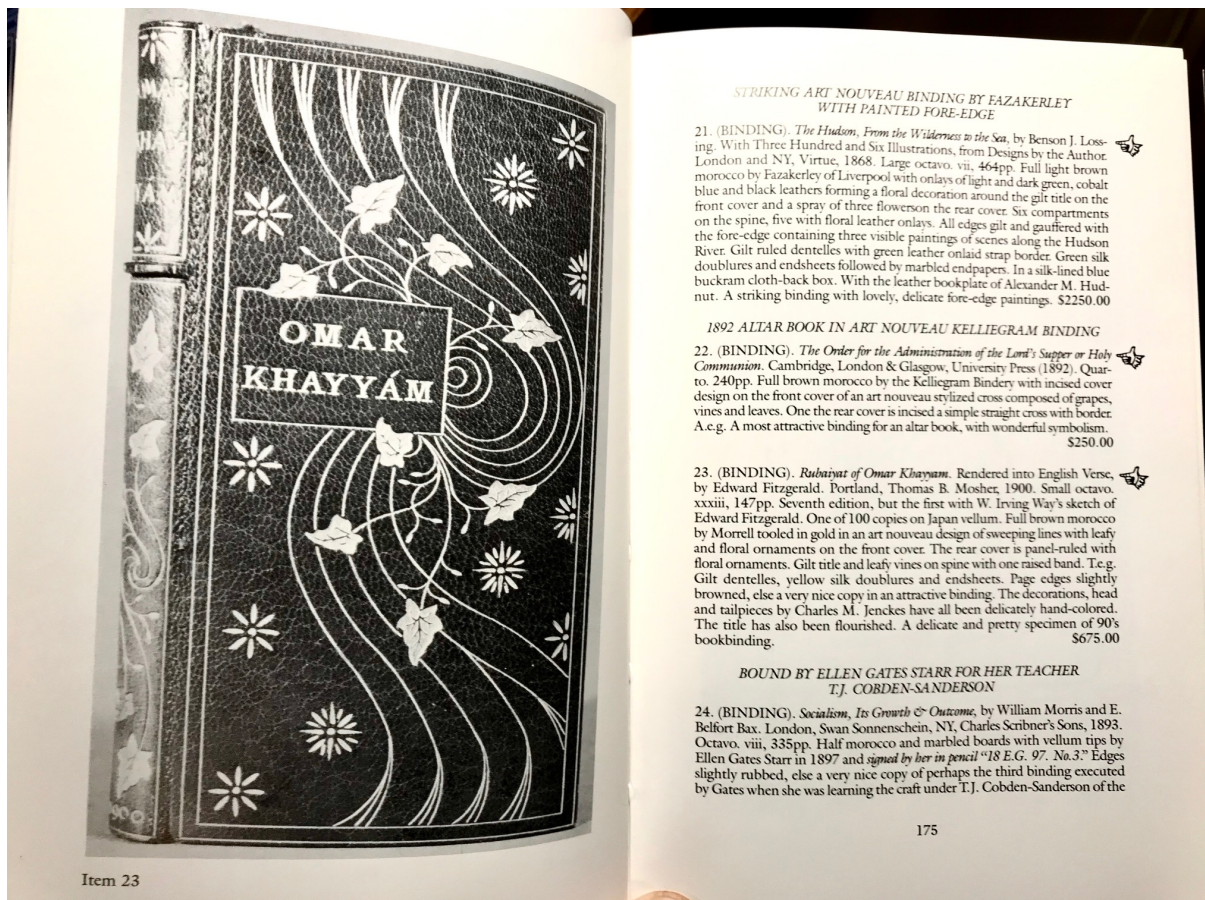


Collector's Correction: A Morrell Binding Once Passed Over

Twenty-Seven years ago! That's how long I waited to recover this binding, and in so doing correcting my initial mistake of passing on this binding from the "House of Morrell," a book bindery of fifty workers in Soho, London headed by W. J. Morrell who took over his father's bindery in 1887. The book, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (Mosher, 1900, 7th ed.).

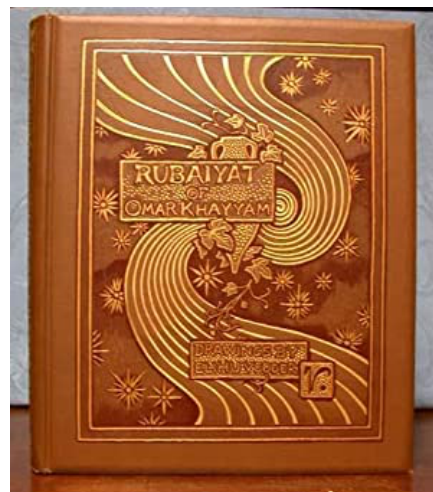
My first acquaintance was when I visited the bookshop of Thomas G. Boss Fine Books then located at 355 Boylston St., Boston. Whenever in Boston my wife and I visited the shop shared with fellow but separate book dealer, Peter Stern. Entering from the street and going up a flight of stairs one entered the bookstore proper and upon immediately turning to the right one saw waist-high jewelry store like showcases displaying some of both firms' finer offerings. By this time Tom Boss knew well of my interest in Mosher, and I spotted several lovely bindings on Mosher Books on display, this particular *Rubaiyat* being there among them. I asked to see the binding and held it for a while but I passed on it in favor of another binding and some other Mosher material which I was quite pleased to acquire. Some time after returning home this Morrell binding was described and pictured in Thomas G. Boss Fine Books' "Catalogue Nine: The Turn of the Century" Part Three, 1993, p. 175, Item #23, which is also pictured on the opposite page [174]:



As soon as I received the catalogue, I regretted my initial thumbs down decision and called to buy it. No such luck. Tom Boss's assistant, John William Pye, gave me the bad news, "I'm sorry, the book has been sold." I would have to live with my fateful decision made when I first encountered it. You snooze, you lose goes the saying. I didn't just snooze, but completely fell

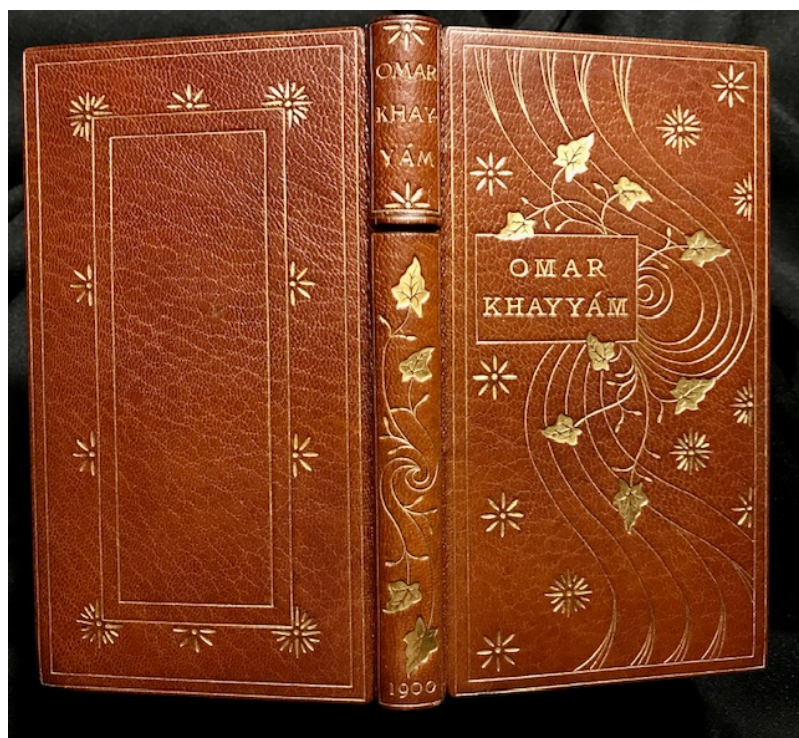
asleep at the switch!

Several years ago I was contacted by Robert J. Milevski, formerly Preservation Librarian at Princeton University Library, books-on-books author (book on ticketed bindings, chapter in *Suave Mechanicals*, et. al.), who continues to work as an Independent Researcher in Princeton, NJ. He referenced Boss's catalogue listing and wanted to know if I had bought that binding. In a flash those pangs of regret were instantly revisited and had to tell him that I had not. As we discussed, he and I both thought that binding was a great example of, and perhaps the only English fine hand-binding that we knew of, that had been inspired by the outstanding *Rubaiyat* cover designed by Elihu Vedder for the 1884 Houghton Mifflin *Rubaiyat*. You snooze, you... so once again I had to suffer the book collector's thought of having lost that one.

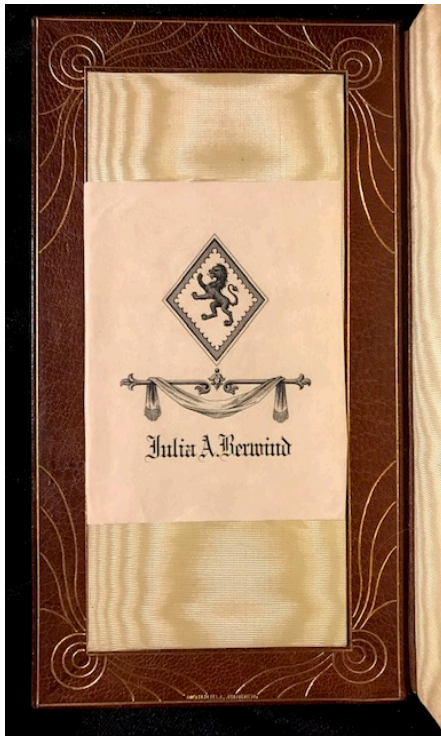


On May 31st I saw a listing on Instagram showing the spines of binding to be offered in an upcoming catalogue. I enlarged the picture which became somewhat blurred the larger I made it, but one thing I could see clearly enough was the spine of this Morrell binding. I mean how could I forget it. I got in contact with the owner and after several emails I asked what book was to the right of the Morrell, to which he partly responded, "Spotted that as a Morrell, eh? It's a beauty." That simply had to be the *Rubaiyat* which had escaped my clutches 27 years ago, apparently held in a large Midwestern fine press and fine bindings collection. One thing led to another and we agreed to terms and within two days the book was in my hands. Yes, gotcha!

So here is a picture of the first Morrell binding to enter the Bishop Collection of Thomas Bird Mosher & the Mosher Press:



FitzGerald, Edward, trans. *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Portland, ME: Thomas B. Mosher, 1900. Seventh edition. Copy #73 of 100 printed on Japan Vellum paper. Designs and headbands by Charles M. Jenckes in Chiswick style. In this copy the title page and all forty head- and tail-pieces are daintily hand-colored in light greens, yellows, red, and gold. Bound in full brown crushed morocco signed MORRELL.BINDER. and on an endpaper stamped CHARLES E. LAURIAT C^o, i.e., bound for the Charles E. Lauriat Company, Booksellers and Importers, Boston, Massachusetts. The design's front cover features a swirling art nouveau design of gouges, leaves, vines, and starbursts stylistically derived from the cover of the 1884 *Rubaiyat* designed by Elihu Vedder. The book's spine sports a complementary gilt-tooled design, while the back cover is composed of nested gilt frames and starbursts. Moire silk doublures with swirling gilt corner designs on wide leather margins. Silk laminated endpapers. Bookplate of Newport, Rhode Island socialite Julia A. Berwind (1864-1961) on the front doublure. In 1922 she inherited the famed and quite sumptuous villa, The Elms, in Newport and lived there until her death. The following year different objects were auctioned off by an heir, quite possibly this binding among them.



As stated in the description of the book, this copy was owned by Julia Berwind, and with her bookplate affixed to the front moire silk doublure. I have always asked myself why owners had to paste their bookplate on any doublure, but that's what some did and this is no exception. At least most of the surrounding leather design is fully visible and the back doublure area is perfectly preserved. The

above picture of Julia Berwind is taken from a larger family picture. Below is a picture of her Newport "cottage" along with a view of its library.



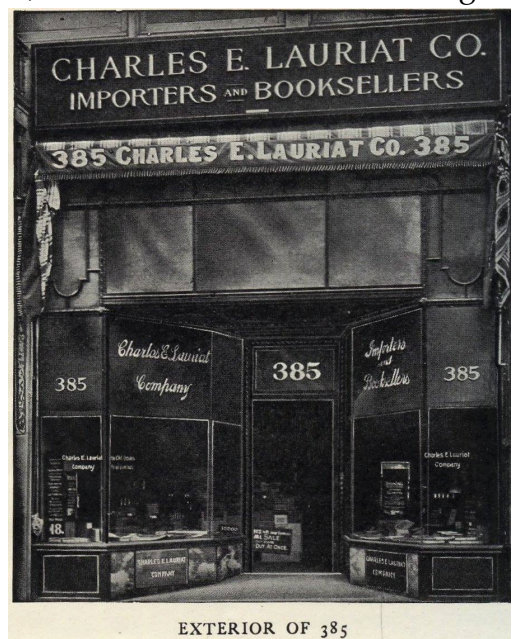
Julia would have visited the same Boston stores that the wealthy were known to visit.



In this case, that destination was the Charles E. Lauriat Co. whose owner made it a point to personally travel to England to purchase books and fine bindings for his clientele. In doing so, he even survived the sinking of the Lusitania.

So with these pictures of this book treasure and some of the info surrounding it, I have enjoyed not only presenting it, but also in giving my own personal

recollections in acquiring it. I enjoy restoring a book's historical context, in fact almost feel it my duty to do so. In recounting my search for Mosher material, I hope to proffer others some insight; but this story also evokes a particularly delightful fond memory of the Boylston St. bookstore, memories of which I still cherish today. For more information information on the



Bishop Collection and/or Thomas Bird Mosher and the Mosher Press, go to the fully searchable Mosher Press website at www.ThomasBirdMosher.net.

Philip R. Bishop

MOSHER BOOKS (ABAA, ILAB, & IOBA; Grolier Club)

Scholarly: www.thomasBirdMosher.net

Business: www.MosherBooks.com

June 5, 2020