

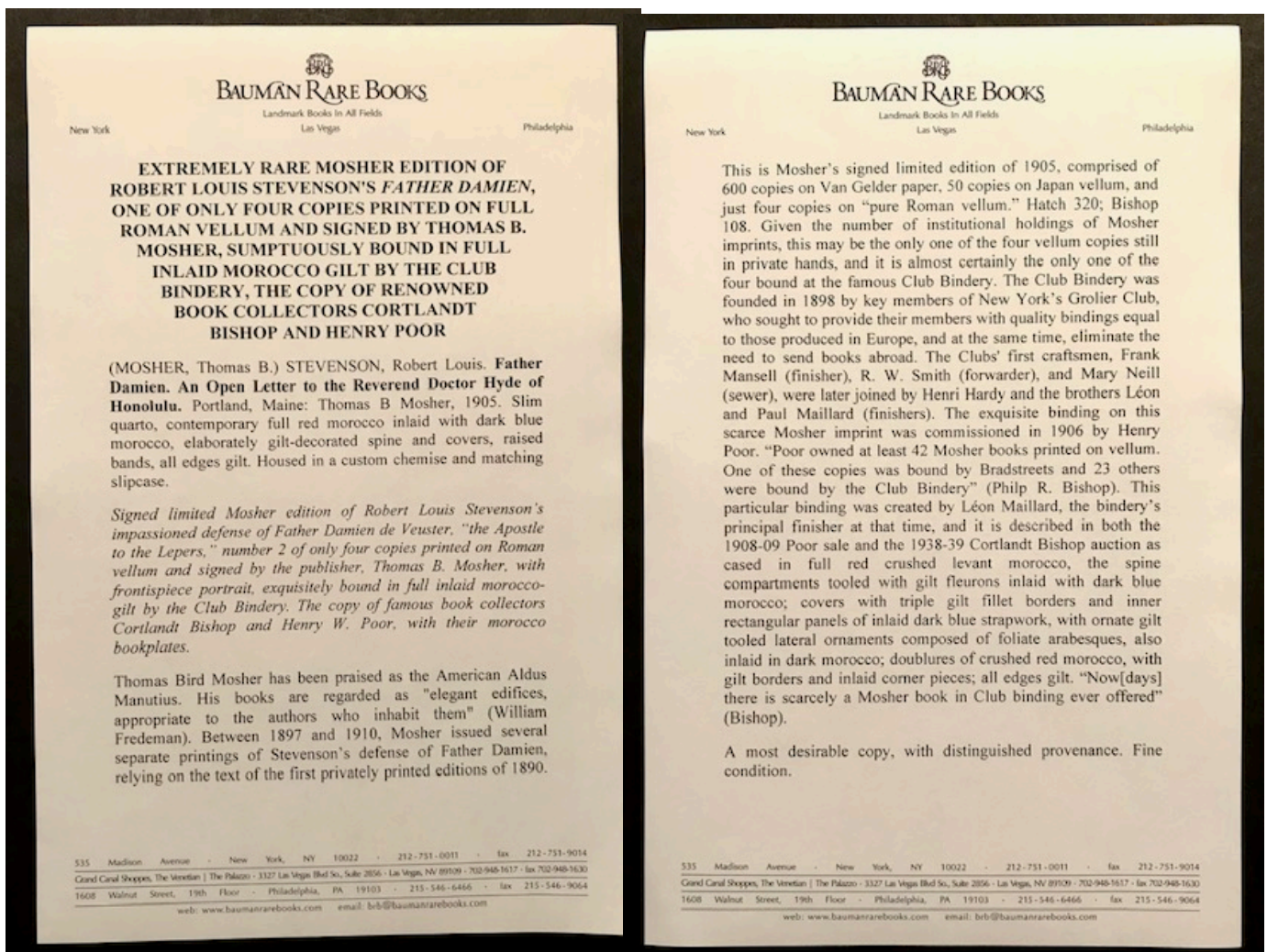
The Personal Side of a Collector's Acquisitions

The H. W. Poor / C. F. Bishop Copy #2 on Vellum of *FATHER DAMIEN* from the Club Bindery

Philip R. Bishop

*Dedicated to Pradeep Sebastian, who revels in the
"Who, What, When, Where, Why and How" of book collecting.*

On July 7th 2021 all was calm and quiet until I received an email out-of-the-blue from Ernest Hilbert of Bauman Rare Books in Philadelphia with the simple note "I thought you might like to see this. Please let me know if you'd like to see it. All best, Ernie" There are two types of "see it" covered here: the attached introductory images via email, and that type of "see it" that really turns up the collector's juices—personally holding it and inspecting it in hand. These 'see-it's always remind me of René Magritte's picture of a smoker's pipe with the caption "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" ('this is not a pipe'). Attached was a description along with some photographs. The description was carefully laid out and included references and quotes to my own bibliographical work on Thomas Bird Mosher's books:



What better way to sell a book than to use the bibliographer's own work and quotes therefrom to support it. So now, if this didn't grab the immediate attention of this collector then nothing would. Let's see, what would be under consideration: a magnificent binding from the Club Bindery coupled with a very limited copy number two of just four* printed on real vellum and if acquired it would be the 40th "pure vellum" Mosher imprint to enter the Bishop Collection. But considerations don't end there! It's also the Henry William Poor / Cortlandt Field Bishop copy (no relation to me except for the love of bindings), two outstanding collectors of the early 20th century. Here are the descriptions that appear in their respective sale catalogues:

Description in the 1909 H. W. Poor Sale (IV, 726)

726. STEVENSON (ROBERT LOUIS). *Father Damien*, by Robert Louis Stevenson. *Portrait*. 4to, full red crushed levant morocco extra, gilt toolings in compartments, and inlaid band and ornaments in dark morocco, doublé with red levant morocco, gilt tooled inside borders, gilt tooled back, gilt edges, by the CLUB BINDERY.

Portland, Me.: Mosher, 1905

* ONE OF 4 COPIES PRINTED ON VELLUM.

Description in the 1938 C. F. Bishop Sale (III, 2152)

ONE OF FOUR COPIES PRINTED ON VELLUM

2152 STEVENSON (ROBERT LOUIS). *Father Damien: An Open Letter to the Reverend Doctor Hyde of Honolulu. Portrait*.

Portland, Maine: Thomas B. Mosher, 1905

4to, crimson crushed levant morocco, gilt tooled back with fleurons inlaid with black morocco; sides with a gilt triple fillet border and an inner rectangular panel frame of inlaid dark blue morocco strapwork, with ornate lateral ornaments composed of foliate arabesques gilt tooled and inlaid in dark blue morocco and an inner gilt tooled floral border; doubleures of crimson crushed levant morocco with a gilt border and inlaid corner ornaments; gilt edges; by THE CLUB BINDERY. In a morocco-edged slip case, with inner half morocco folder. ONE OF FOUR COPIES PRINTED ON VELLUM, numbered and signed by Thomas B. Mosher.

From the library of Henry W. Poor, with bookplate.

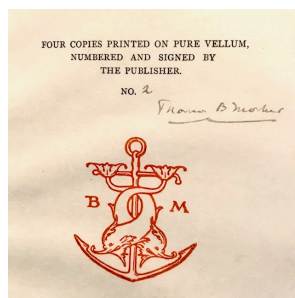
One also has to recognize that it's an important piece of literature being one of the great diatribes in the English language, and by none other than the favorite author, Robert Louis Stevenson. Indeed, the text of this book fascinated Thomas Bird Mosher so much so that he published it in his little magazine, *The Bibelot*, then followed that with a limited edition in his 'Reprints from The Bibelot' Series, and again

published eleven editions in his Miscellaneous Series, all of which culminated midway in the exceptional new and expanded typographical edition of 1905 accompanied by head- and tail-pieces by Edward Edwards, and charming engraved initials by Frank R. Rathbun, and of course the lovely frontispiece of *Father Damien* by Edward Clifford. With Mosher's own foreword, his own bibliography of the work compiled at the end, and his signature appearing under the colophon's limitation statement at the end, what's not to highly recommend purchase to bring this magnificent artifact into the Bishop Collection. Everything was screaming go, go, go except for the little matter of

price and how to pay for it.

The exchanges of twenty-five emails with Ernie were delightful. After responding how pleased I was to receive their quote, we investigated what the bottom line would be and he indicated he'd be "happy to send to you to see on approval as long as you like." In turn I indicated it would be good to "examine it up front and personal" to which he responded he'd send it along for approval and "please consider it for as long as you like and let me know if you'd like to keep or return it..." Instead of overnight mail to arrive the next day of July 8, I elected to hold off mailing until the beginning of the following week "since there is no really good reason to get it *immediately*." Although what I really wanted was for it to be in my hands the very next minute, I actually needed a little bit of breathing room to digest the whirlwind of all that was happening and to determine my decision upon careful examination, not to mention need to reflect on various strategies to cover the cost. After a restless weekend, the book was mailed on Monday. The following day I indicated the "box from Bauman's retrieved from post office in fine shape. Will be opening later today, and take some time to closely look over the book & binding, then get back to you" to which Ernie responded "no rush, Phil. A thing of beauty is a joy forever, after all, or so I've heard." I was feeling quite assured that there was no pressure, which I very much appreciated.

On July 15th I respectfully wrote to Ernie inquiring whether they would accept terms, roughly a third down, then another third within a few weeks, then a final payment which would give me "time to pay for the book." This was the last hurdle, to which Ernie replied "that's fine. I'd like you to have the book,



and I'm amenable to this proposal." This all progressed rather splendidly, and I let him know how pleased I was:

It's a deal [followed by a handshake emoji].

First let me *thank you*, not only for your generous acceptance of these terms, but also for your original notification.

Yes, I have your invoice, and will send you a check tomorrow, Friday the 16th. Should you wish to revise your invoice reflecting the terms and send that as an email attachment, that would be perfectly fine. I probably will send a check each time; however, should I run into a monetary squeeze, then I will be on the phone to give you my credit card. Regardless, I will notify you by email each time a payment goes out.

If you don't mind my asking, and certainly up to you to answer or not, do you have an idea as to the later provenance of the book so that you might share that, however plainly or without detail as you're comfortable. Secondly, how is it that you even thought of me to quote the book? Have we met?

Again, my thanks for all you've done. Much appreciated.

Best wishes,

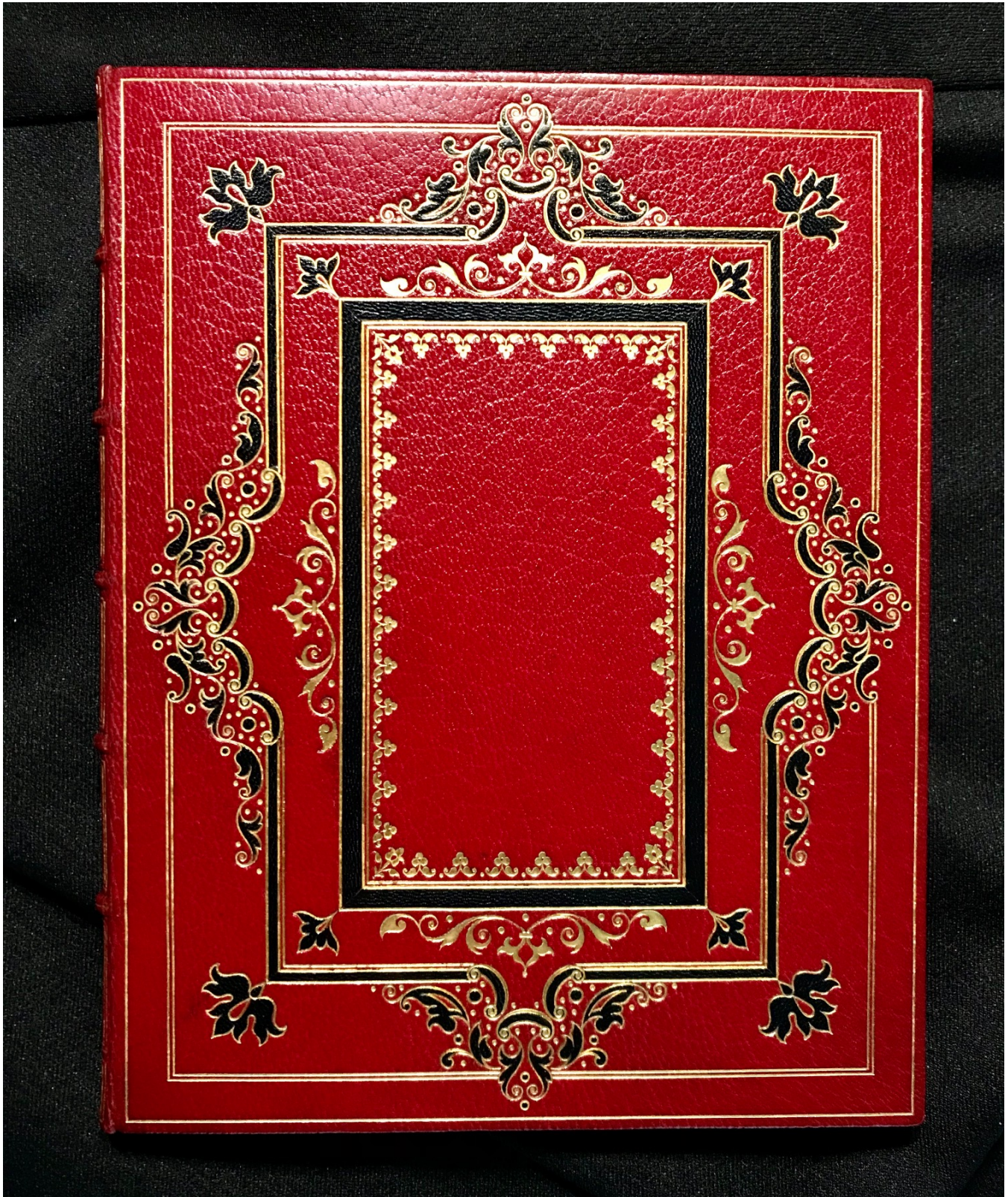
It took a little while for his response due to workload, but he finally indicated that "While I can't disclose the names of the consignors, I can say that you are known in the trade as an expert. You are also recommended at BIBLIO. It takes a person of rare taste and knowledge to appreciate certain books. I'm very glad to hear you'll be keeping it." I can say without a doubt that this was one of the most pleasurable book buying experiences. It wasn't the first time I bought a nice item from Bauman Rare Books, thinking back on the time I purchased a letter from the poet Robert Frost to Thomas Bird Mosher, and should there be another opportunity, I will certainly take such under consideration. The firm of Bauman Rare Books founded by David and Natalie Bauman will always remain one of my choice booksellers with whom to deal.

Concurrently the very same day I received *Father Damien* at the post office, I also received a mysterious package from the University of Delaware. I actually opened it before I opened the Bauman package. Inside I found a copy of the *RUBÁIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM* rendered into English verse by Edward FitzGerald and into Greek by Ernest Crawley of Bradfield College of Berkshire, England. The book was privately printed for Nathan Haskell Dole at the Merrymount Press in Boston in 1902. This is copy No. 41 of 150 on hand-made paper, numbered and signed by Nathan Haskell Dole. The significance: bookplate of Thomas Bird Mosher. Inserted along with the book was a hand written note from a dear book-collector colleague and Grolier member, Mark Samuels Lasner reading "Dear Phil. I hope that you and Susann are well and that life in this mad, sad and uncertain time has had no ill effects. It struck me that the enclosed has, as our friend Dave Holmes would say, your name on it. Best, Mark." I didn't respond via email, but rather sent Mark a special note of thanks on my Mosher stationary typeset and printed by David Wolfe. Additionally, I want to here publically thank him for the very kind gift, the significance of which, arriving on the very same day as the *Father Damien*, I am still trying to ponder.

And so now, I've dawdled long enough and show readers that which is not the book, thank you Magritte, but good enough to give you some idea of this wonder, and so we turn to the photographs. Keep in mind that this is not a book as Magritte's might say.

* For those interested in where all four of the vellum copies are, the most prominent owner of one was Harry Widener (the name speaks volumes in the bookish world including his untimely death on the Titanic). I examined his copy #1 in original limp vellum with ties at Harvard's Widener Library, with a room specifically dedicated to his personal library. Mosher's copy was #4 which came up at auction in 1971 in original limp vellum with ties. Location now unknown. The only other copy was #3 and that was in sheets only as listed in the 1916 sale catalog of Gertrude Cowdin. Copy #2 is the only one in full period binding by the Club Bindery.

Photograph:

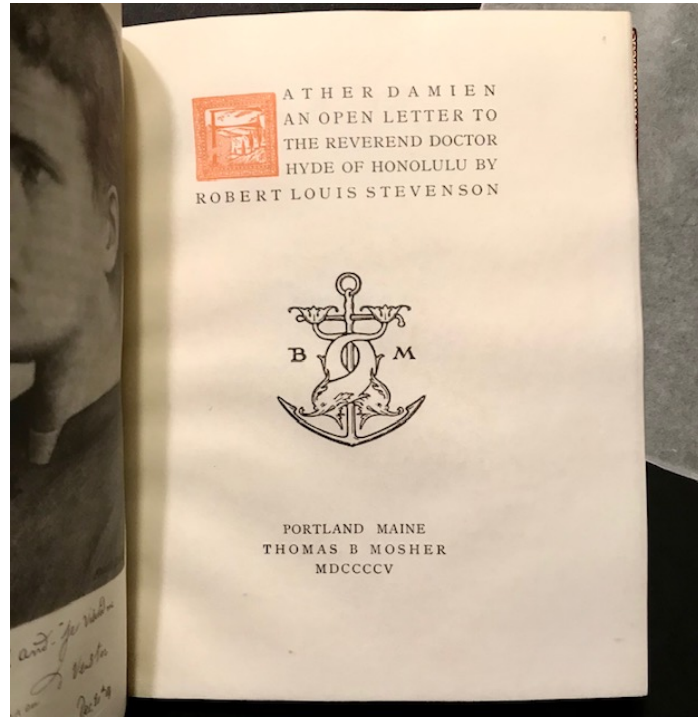


ca. 9" x 7"

...and more photographs:



Opened Club binding on Father Damien



Title page with Rathbun's capital letter and Clifford's frontispiece

Front leather doublure & close-up of signed binder's mark



Cortlandt Field Bishop & Henry William Poor bookplates

