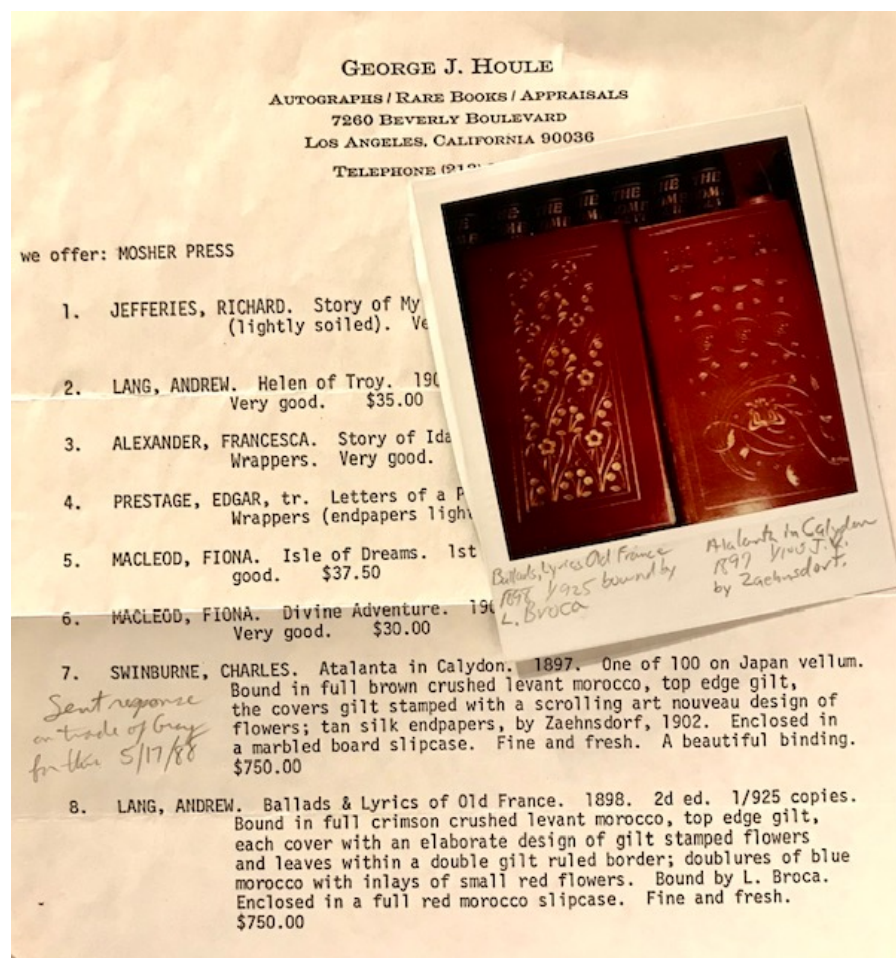


The Weight of the Wait

—The Backstory to a Broca Binding's Acquisition—

Lucien Broca, a late 19th / early 20th century West End London bookbinder, was the Frenchman who ghost-bound Sarah Prideaux's best bindings of the mid-1890's (see Tidcomb "Women Binders..."). He trained under Antoine Chatelin and later partnered with Simon Kauffman (1876-1889) until he took up his own premises, referring to himself as an "Art Binder." He was widely recognized as a superb trade finisher.

Inside our living room then wholly converted to the Mosher Collection library, I was avariciously looking over a quote I received from George J. Houle, of Los Angeles, CA (now in Palm Springs, CA).



This was thirty-four years ago and I had not yet entered the bookselling field, so I was looking at prices net to me as a collector. I had already begun in earnest to build the Mosher collection, but his offerings 1-6 were already covered on my shelves. Offerings #7 and #8, however, were a different matter, these being unique copies because they were in special bindings. A polaroid photograph of the two bindings accompanied his listing of the Mosher books he had in stock, a list solicited by me in the form of a targeted mailing of my Wants List to dealers. I tried to come up with a trade but to no avail. Each of the two bindings was \$750, both “fine and fresh” and both highly desirable. Alas, I could only afford one, and so my pick was the Swinburne *Atalanta in Calydon* bound by Zaehnsdorf. It seemed to me to have more

pizzazz as a splendid example of Art Nouveau tooling. The other would have to wait with the realization that I might never see it again. It wasn't as appealing to me given what I was seeing in the photograph. I had the chance, but passed. Of course I'm a packrat when it comes to Mosher stuff, and the quote along with the photograph were filed in my “Mosher's in Bindings” folder which became handy when I was going about the business of constructing my bio-bibliography of Mosher and his books. After an eager wait, I received the Zaehnsdorf binding and it still complements my shelves in the collection. So that's where matters rested, except for seeing the photo and the quote in my bindings folder, and as time passed I gave up the idea that I could go back and retrieve the other binding. This ABAA dealer surely sold it, but at least I had record of it. *Ainsi va la vie.*

That was thirty-four years ago and much has changed in that time. I have been using Instagram quite a bit here of late and posting pictures of all of the special bindings in the collection. I mix up the listings but often highlight a thread of a particular binder. All the postings are meant to illustrate the fact that binders the world over have been using The Mosher Books to bind for themselves, or for clients, or to enter their bindings into exhibitions. I had presented a string of five Lucien Broca bindings in the

collection and following one of them I received an intriguing response sent to me via Intragram's personal messaging. The message was from Christopher Brink, Director and Senior Specialist of Fine Books and Manuscripts at Potter & Potter Auctions in Chicago:

Dear Philip,

I hope you are well. I saw your Lucien Broca post recently and wanted to alert you to a work of his that we have coming up (as well as another Mosher title printed on vellum!) The auction isn't posted yet but I thought you might like a sneak peek at what is coming up on February 26. I have attached photos in case you are interested.

Best wishes,

Chris Brink

Director of Fine Books

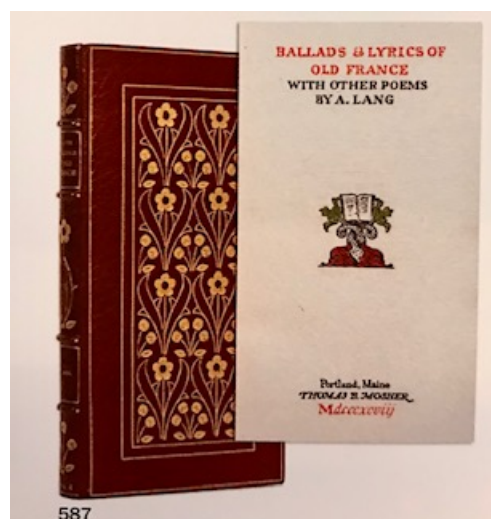
Upon seeing the three pictures he sent I quickly recognized the red binding as probably the one which I passed on thirty-four years ago. Had George Houle sold it and the other collector or dealer/buyer was now selling it after years of enjoyment? My answer lay in the second offering, a "pure vellum" copy (one of just four, signed by Mosher) of *Our Lady's Tumbler—A Twelfth Century Legend* done out of Old French into English by Philip H. Wicksteed, this being copy #4. I had been monitoring Houle's listing for this same #4 copy on the Internet for a couple years, but noticed that it disappeared on the ABAA and ABE Books on-line sites. I never bought it, not because it was inordinately expensive (on the contrary, reasonably price), but because I already owned copy #3 from the Henry William Poor library with his bookplate and one was enough. Now I knew why it dropped out of sight. The Potter & Potter listing had to be from Houle Rare Books & Manuscripts and the accompanying Broca binding the lot before was then most certainly that very copy Houle offered me thirty-four years previously. Amazing.

I eagerly signed up with Potter & Potter Auctions, received their splendid Fine Books & Manuscripts catalogue for the February 26, 2022 auction, and registered to have my bid conducted via telephone. The description was intriguing which I quote here:

587. [MOSHER, Thomas Bird (1852-1923)].— LANG, Andrew (1844-1912). **Ballads & Lyrics of Old France...** Portland, Maine: Thomas B. Mosher, 1898.

Tall 12mo. Numerous hand-colored decorations in text. Full crushed red levant with single gilt fillet border, paneled with gilt tooled fleuron ornaments within 2 gilt fillet frames, 5 compartments with 4 raised bands, 3 compartments with gilt tooled fleuron ornaments, gilt-lettering in remainder, top edge gilt, crushed blue morocco doublures with a fleuron gilt centerpiece with petals inlaid with red morocco within numerous gilt fillets, gilt stamp-signed by Lucien Broca; burgundy straight-grain morocco slipcase (gift initialed "B.A."). Provenance: F. C. Hubbard (bookplate).

LIMITED EDITION, one of 925 copies on Van Gelder paper published for Mosher's Old World Series which reprinted "acknowledged master of literature". **350/450**

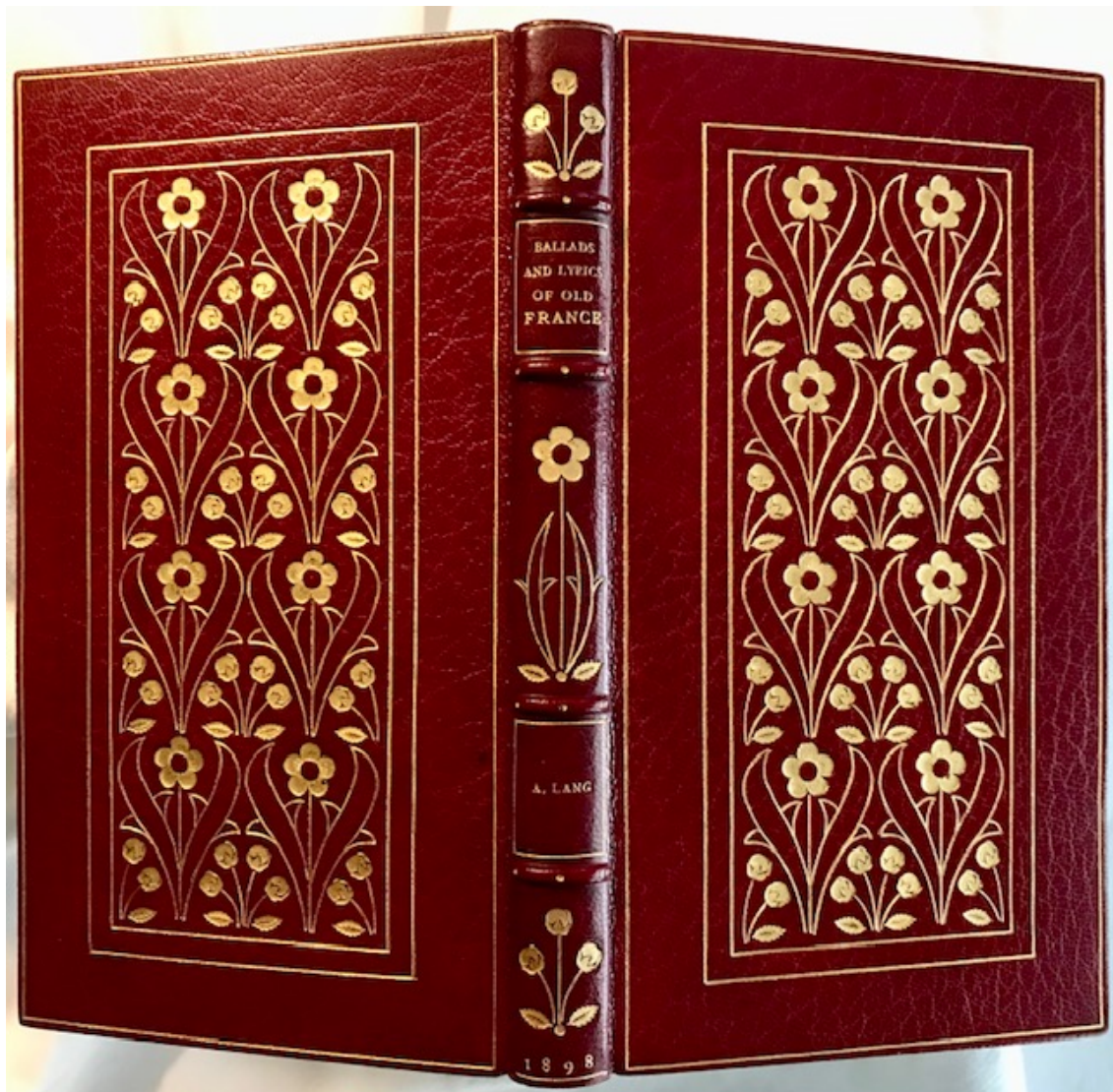


Two things in the Potter & Potter catalogue description attracted my attention. One was either a typo or missed letter assignment. The bookplate had to be that of F. T. Hubbard, not F. C. Hubbard. I'm quite familiar with his bookplate and own several bindings that came from his bindings-rich collection. The other is the statement indicating "numerous hand-colored decorations in text" accompanied the piece (one on the title-page itself as one can see in Potter & Potter's catalogue picture above. Houle Books never mentioned the hand-coloring. Curious, but most likely simple oversight.

After a month of waiting, including asking for a few more pictures to confirm the design on the back cover of the binding and to see pictures of the front and back blue doublures, the day of reckoning came

and early evening EST the phone rang. Off to the races. After initial sounds of excitement the bidding commenced. Bid after bid came in, but I held with a steady "Yes". Actually it was over soon after it began and my proxy on the other end said, "Congratulations, you got it." That was on Saturday, and on late Monday the invoice arrived and I paid it all about 5 minutes after receiving the invoice. I must say at this point that Potter & Potter Auctions were quite good and accommodating. Everything went like clockwork, including their on-line presentation of every step of the auction. In common parlance, they have their s--- together. A couple days later I received the tracking number for the package and monitored it leaving Chicago and arriving at the loading dock of my post office which receives UPS packages on my behalf. It took another day of nervously waiting to finally have the package in hand. Christmas arrived again! (the usual feeling every time something important is received for the collection).

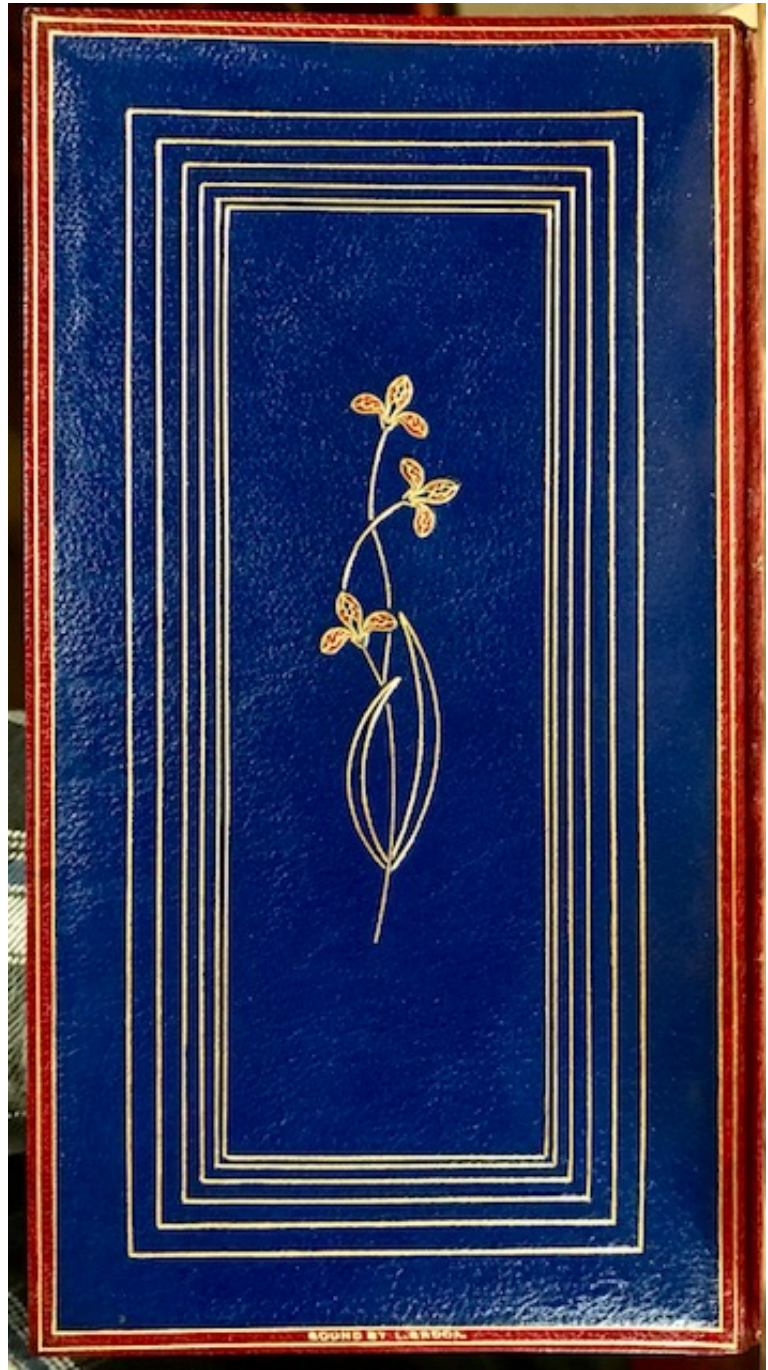
So now it's time to introduce this binding to the reader. I think you'll like what you see. I know my wife and I oohed and aahed over the binding when we first saw it, including finding the precious petit hand-illuminations throughout. I'll picture certain elements of the binding and some of the book's contents. So sit back and relax with the following visual display of this newest acquisition to the bindings section of The Bishop Collection of Thomas Bird Mosher and The Mosher Books.



Binding measures 7"(h) x 4"(w) x 11/16" (d)



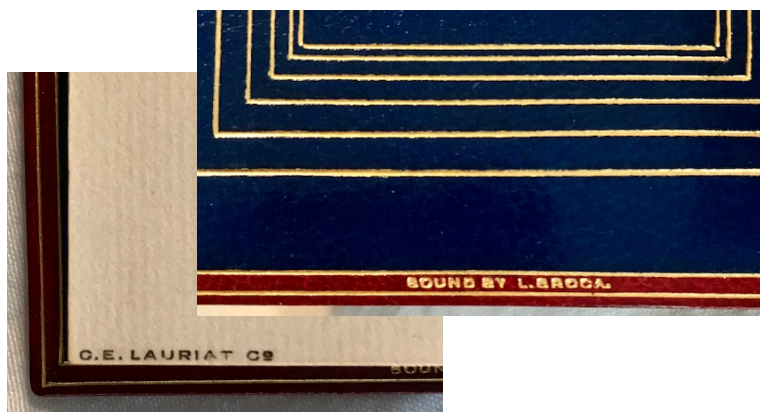
Mysterious “BA.” is stamped on slipcase back.

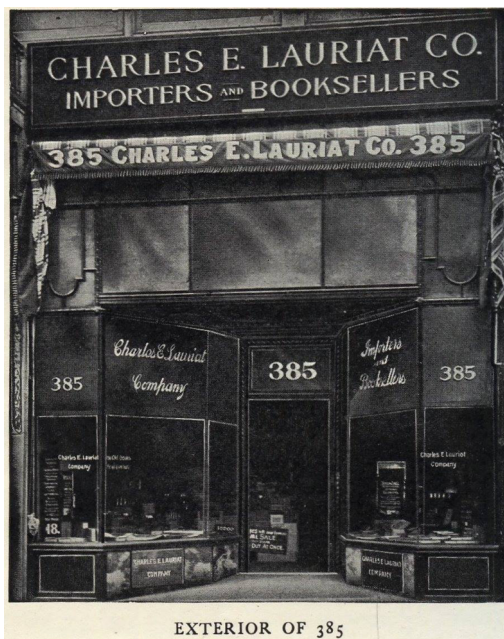


Front doublure with binder's name stamped-signed at the bottom



F. T. Hubbard bookplate. Seal with three lions and a griffin head at top. Banner with words “Nec timeo nec sperno” (Don’t be afraid nor spurn) a copy of which is in the “Harvard Men bookplate collection” at Harvard College Library. Dates to 1898.

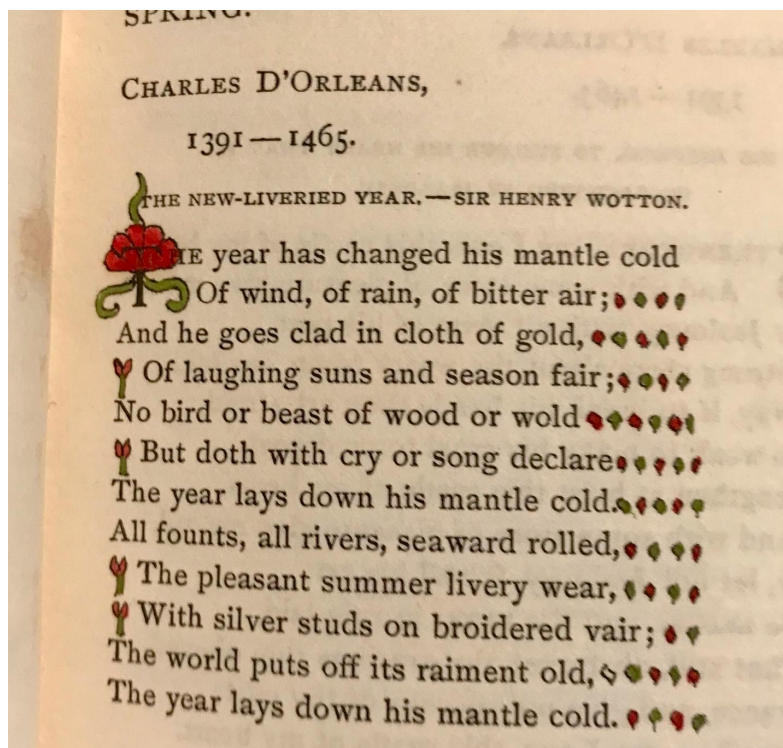
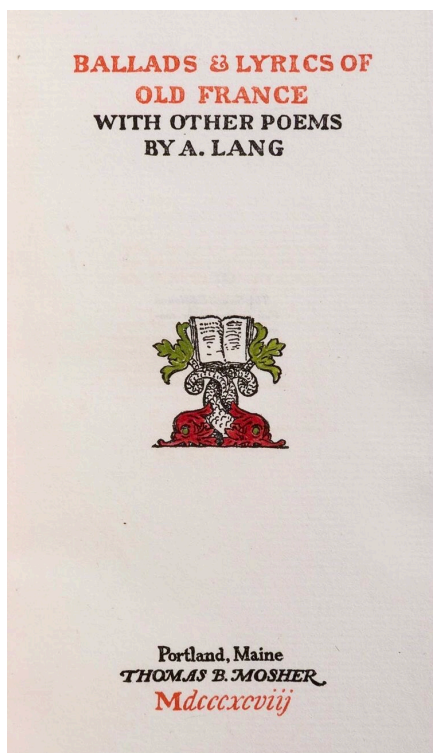


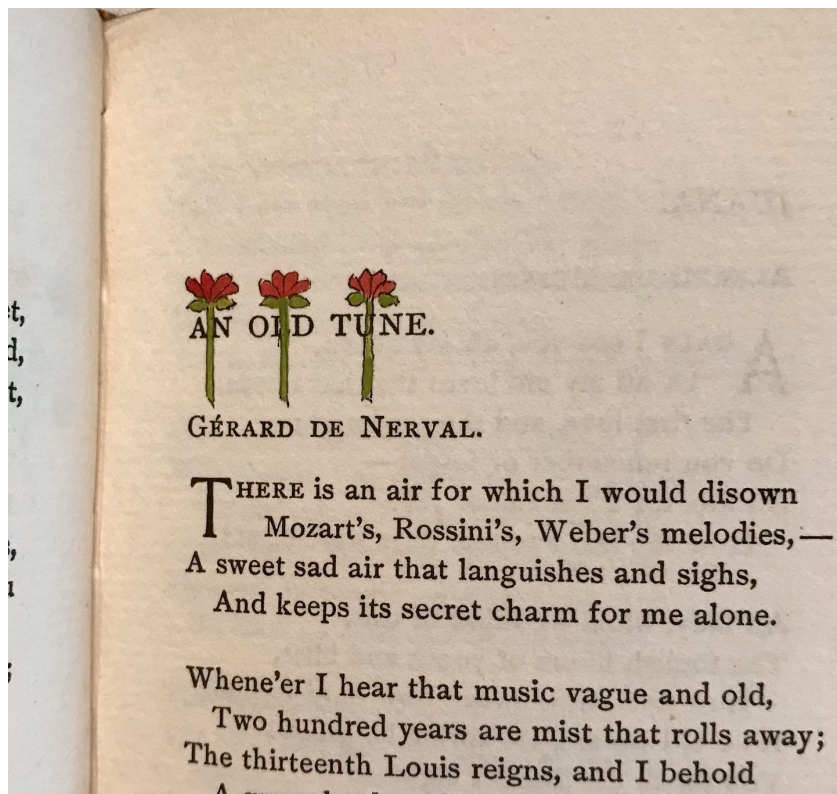
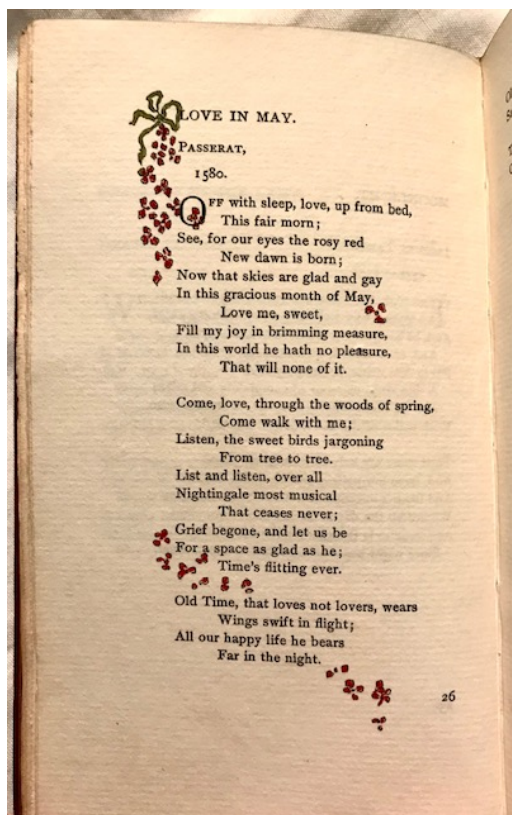
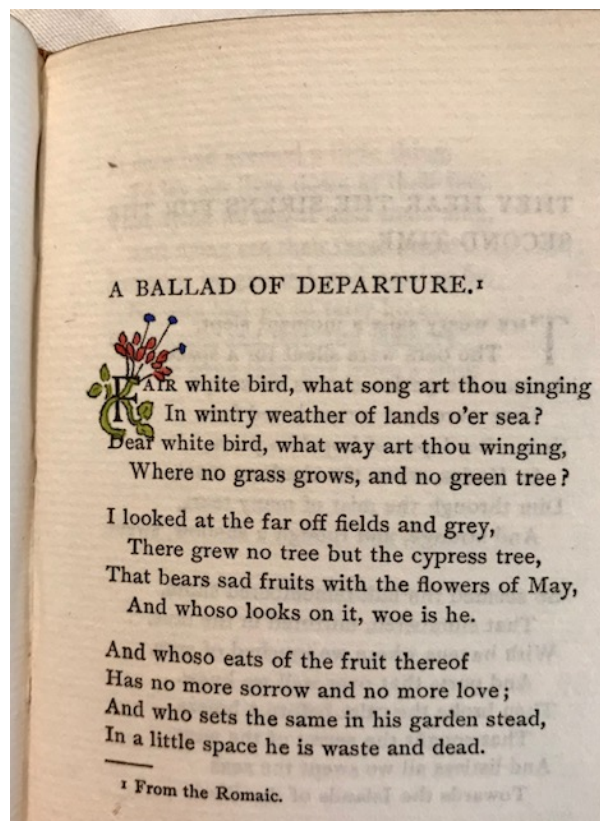
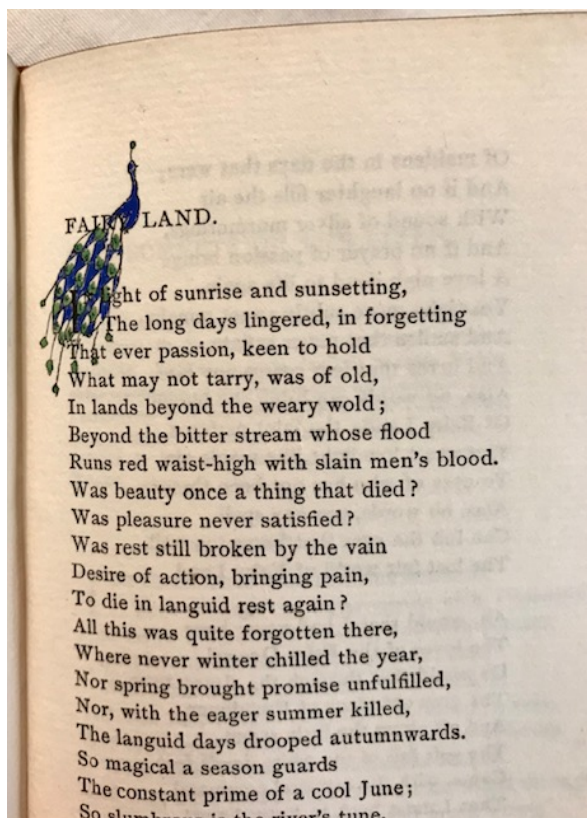


In addition to the “Bound by L. Broca” stamp, the book also carries the black-stamp of “C. E. Lauriat Co.” whose owner made it a point to personally travel to England to purchase books and fine bindings for his clientele back in Boston. In doing so, he even survived the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Lauriat’s was THE place to go for art bindings for his discriminating clientele. It’s through these doors that our F. T. Hubbard must have traversed and met with Charles Lauriat himself. Perhaps Hubbard was a favorite customer, or may have even encouraged Lauriat to bring back more of those Lucien Broca bindings, six of which are now in the Bishop Collection along with a beautiful Zaehnsdorf Art Nouveau binding also bearing the F. T. Hubbard bookplate. As a side note, F. T. Hubbard apparently also bound some of his own books. The Bishop Collection includes a copy of the Mosher *Empedocles on Etna* which he signed at the base of the spine F.T.H. / 1900 (no bookplate inside). Another example in the collection is Ludovic Halevy’s *L’ABBE CONSTANTIN* (1888). Here the

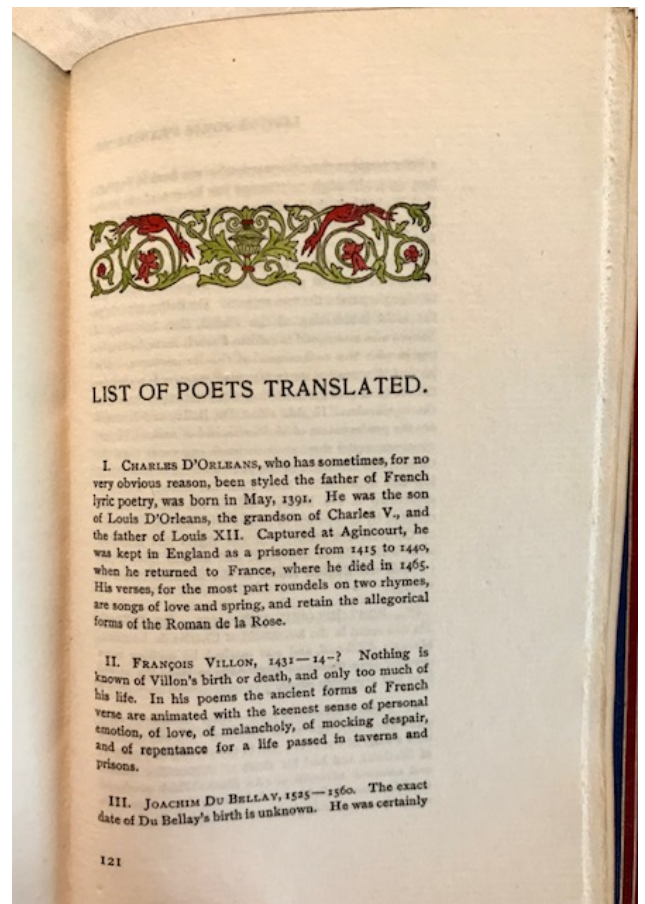
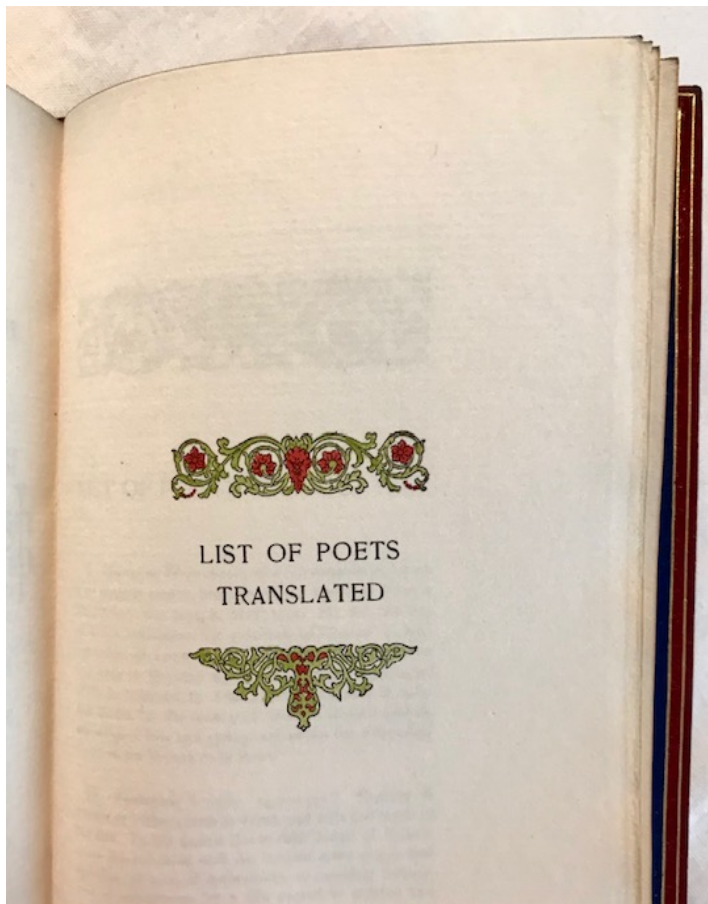
half-leather binding is signed at the foot of the spine F.T.H. / 1899, and the book includes F. T. Hubbard’s bookplate as well. This lover of bindings and amateur binder may very well be Frederic Tracy Hubbard (1875-1962), a life-long resident of the Boston area (Brookline), graduate of Harvard, and by profession an American botanist and agrostologist who for many years was a Botanical Assistant at the “Botanical Museum” of Harvard University. He was also known to sign his name as F. T. Hubb.

With regard to the hand illumination, including the colorization of the title page’s dolphins and colorization of the head- and tail-pieces, the following is an account of their number, sample pictures of which follow these counts: **Publisher’s mark on title page hand colorized; 10 hand illuminated pages: 1, 3, 16, 26, 27, 31, 50, 75, 93, 101; and 20 head- and tail-pieces hand colorized in 12 locations (8 sets of 2, and 4 single).** Samples from these appear below:





The two colorizations on the next page represent a double set (head & tail piece on the left) and a type page wide colorized head-piece on the right:



So this small volume with its Broca binding and hand-illuminations carries a good bit of “weight” as an admirable new entry into the Mosher Collection. It was worth the wait!

And so here is concluded the presentation
of the sixth Broca binding to enter
The Bishop Collection



Philip R. Bishop March 7, 2022

P.S. Thanks to my wife, Susann, who suggested the title of this essay, and of course thanks to Chris Brink of Potter & Potter Auctions for first bringing it to my attention this second time around.