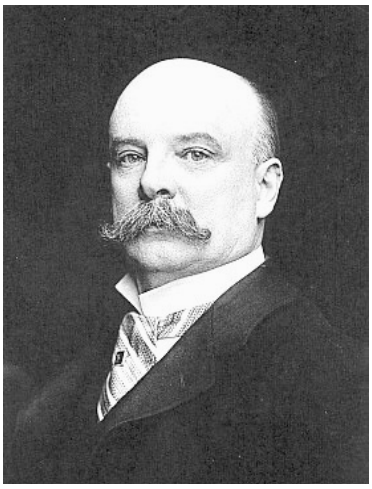


Henry William Poor
(1844-1915)

Thomas Bird Mosher
(1852-1923)



Inscription to a Fallen Star

By Philip R. Bishop

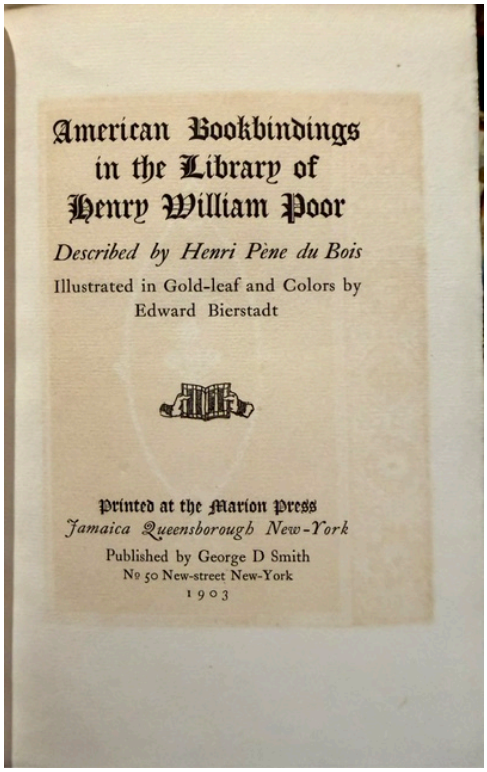
An inscribed copy of the monumental *Memories of President Lincoln*… by Walt Whitman (Portland, ME: Thomas Bird Mosher, 1912) was sent to Henry William Poor, one of the foremost book collectors in America, known for his extensive collection of incredibly fine books at the turn of the 19th/20th centuries. In Donald Dickinson's *Dictionary of American Book Collectors* (NY: Greenwood Press1986), Poor's background is encapsulated from his birth in Bangor, Maine, on June 16, 1844, his move with the family to New York City, and his education at Harvard University where he received his A. B., and M.A., in 1865 (he could read multiple languages). Dickinson further elaborates:

> After graduating from Harvard, Poor entered the family brokerage firm, where as part of his duties he supervised the publication of a survey of railroad statistics. As *Poor's Railway Manual*, this guide became famous as the authoritative source for investors in the field [the predecessor to *Standard & Poor's*]. Poor's own financial career was marked with spectacular successes and equally spectacular failures. For a time at the turn of the century he had the means to employ experts to do his collecting. No less an authority than Stanford White bought art treasures for him, while Valentin Blacque secured his books and manuscripts. Poor thus amassed a lavish assortment of fine bindings, illuminated manuscripts, first editions, and press books. For example, he had the first edition of Thomas à Kempis' *De Imitatio Christi*, the inevitable signatures of the Presidents of the United States, and Caxton's printing of Higden's *Polychronicon*. –p.262 [*to be continued*]

It's safe to say that Poor was one of New York's book collecting titans of this Gilded Age period. He joined America's premier collector's organization, The Grolier Club in 1891 which is where he most likely first got to know Thomas Bird Mosher (also born in Maine) of The Mosher Books operating out of Portland, Maine. Among the private presses H. W. Poor collected, Mosher's publications held a special place in Poor's heart, in fact in addition to his own publications, Mosher himself would at times procure some of the private presses Poor desired. One such private letterpress was The Daniel Press in England of the Rev. Dr. C. H. O. Daniel (1836-1919) which first operated out of Frome and then later at the University of Oxford where Daniel would become

Provost of Worcester College. Henry Poor had become familiar with Mosher's edition of Robert Bridge's *The Growth of Love* which Mosher reprinted in 1894 based upon the Daniel Press edition, replete with a facsimile of Daniel's 1889 half-title page and Daniel's printer's mark. Mosher's reprint of another Daniel Press book, *The Garland of Rachel* (Mosher, 1902) this time carried a check-list of the Daniel Press as a second appendix to the volume, a list of 51 publications which Henry W. Poor "prepared and revised" based upon his own Daniel Press collection which was said "to be the most complete series of this imprints in existence."(pp. 61-[64]) other than that collection held by Falconer Madan of the Bodlien Library of Oxford.

Aside from their mutual interest and collaboration surrounding The Daniel Press, Poor would also become one of Mosher's top four collectors of his wares. In addition to the regular paper copies mostly on Van Gelder paper), Mosher would reserve for Poor a copy No. 2 of each of the Japan vellum books he published, and likewise a copy No 2 of each highly limited book Mosher printed on pure vellum. By 1907 Poor acquired 46 of Mosher's vellum printings (Mosher himself had 47), many of which he had placed in commissioned bindings by America's best binders. Another statistic involving the Mosher publications is that the final sale of Poor's library showed 30 Mosher books (printed on vellum or Japan vellum were in bindings produced at The Club Bindery. Incidentally, the Bishop Collection holds 41 books from Poor's library, including a number of Poor's copies printed on vellum or Japan vellum, some being in the aforementioned Club bindings.


American Bookbindings
in the Library of
Henry William Poor

Described by Henri Pène du Bois

Illustrated in Gold-leaf and Colors by
Edward Bierstadt

Printed at the Marion Press
Jamaica Queensborough New-York
Published by George D Smith
№ 50 New-street New-York
1903

In the collection of bindings, Poor's collection contained so many fine bindings (I've never seen a count), and he held fine bindings in the upper echelon of American book bindings. His collection was highly celebrated and a book detailing some of his holdings was produced in 1903. The book staked Poor's claim to be holding some of the finest examples of American binders, especially those of the later 19th and early 20th centuries. The book itself was a marvel. It's the most important book on American bookbinding published at the time, or perhaps at any time since. A stunning example of color reproduction, containing thirty-nine covers of fine bindings in vibrant and true colors with shimmering gold from high-calibre firms and binders such as The Club Bindery, Curtis Walters, William Matthews, Smith & Mansell, Stikeman, Otto Zahn of The Toof Bindery, Bradstreet's, the Adams Bindery, and early American binders. What a line-up.

The impact of this publication, coming out in 1903, leads to these further points for consideration as to its worth in demonstrating Henry William Poor at the height of his reputation:

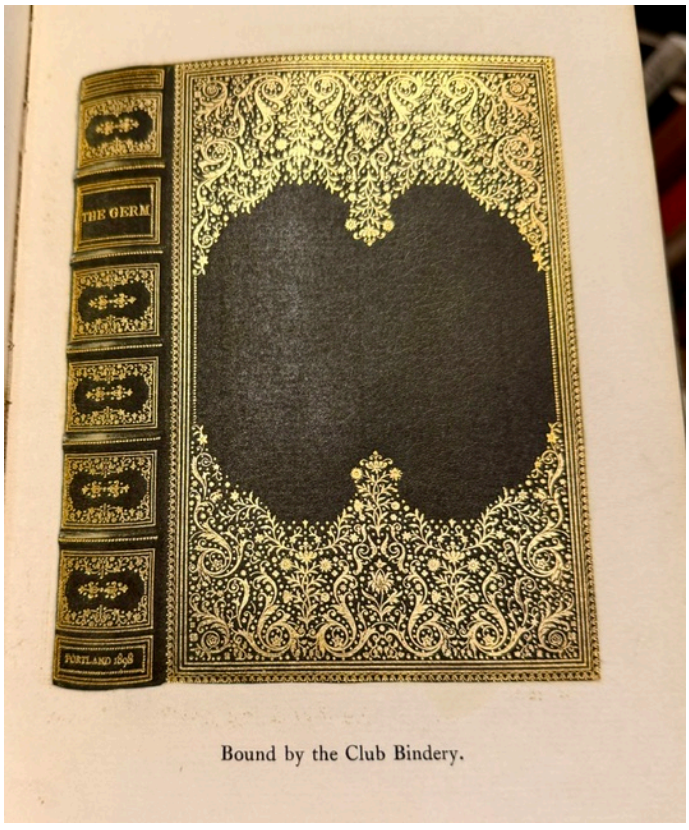
 In 1908 the Anderson Auction Company of New York called this book "The most sumptuously printed and illustrated work on Bookbindings ever produced in America." ("Rare and Fine Books including a Portion of the Library of Chas Belden van Nostrand / New York City", Feb. 13 & 14, 1908, Source Record Number 6 32-13).

 In another Anderson Auction sale in 1908, Anderson Auction Co. (AAC) called it “the most beautiful book of its kind ever issued in America” (Source record 656-64).

 For the Preston A. Perry sale, AAC said of it, “the Illustrations are remarkably well done, and represent some of the finest work in binding done in this country” (Source record 658-307).

 “The plates are in colors and gold, by the Bierstadt process… More faithful reproductions of book bindings have never been made. The colors and textures of the leathers are perfectly given by the impression from glass plates, while the gold tooling is carried out in applied gold leaf. The effect is so rich and true to the original materials that one gets fully as satisfactory a view of the bindings as if the originals were seen in glass exhibition cases.” Another 1908 catalogue says “The plates are probably the most beautiful and accurate reproductions of bindings ever made, each having been stamped in gold leaf from brass dies.” *The Literary Collector-An Illustrated Monthly Magazine of Book-Lore and Bibliography*. Vol. VII, Nov. 1903-April 1904. Greenwich, CT & New York: The Literary Collector Press, pp. 12-13.

 Finally, “This binding [a Bradstreet’s binding in my collection] is on a book that shows fine bindings like no other book before or after it has.”—Pradeep Sebastian, author of *The Book Beautiful—A Memoir of Collecting Rare and Fine Books* (2023), *The Book Hunters of Katpadi* (2017) and *The Groaning Shelf and Other Instances of Book Love* (2010).



Bound by the Club Bindery.

Opposite page 40 there appears this Club binding on none other than a vellum copy of Mosher’s 1898 *The Germ* which is now at the Huntington Library. Described on p. 38 we read, “Mosher’s edition of The Germ of 1850, reprinted in 1898, a copy on vellum, is in blue mantled with lace gilt, lined in vellum bordered with blue, by the Club Bindery. Mr. Poor’s library has the original edition of this work the admirable folly of which may not be excelled…”

One can imagine the pride which Mosher felt upon seeing his publication counted among these few pictured in the book. The Mosher Book was among the elect. Incidentally, the Bishop Collection contains three copies of this imprint, one inscribed by the Poor to Frank D. Millet, the sculptor, painter, muralist, author, and famed war correspondent whose misfortune it was to have taken that fateful voyage aboard The Titanic. Another copy is covered in a drop-dead gorgeous binding by Bradstreet’s, one of the binderies included in the *American Bookbindings in the Library of Henry William Poor.*

Following the appearance of the American bindings in Poor's library, there is a letter which is preserved in the Bishop Collection which gives us an insight to the tight and trusting connection between the publisher and the collector toward the end of 1904:

November 8, 1904 Portland, Maine

My Dear Mr. Poor:--

I am sending you the new books to-day including the copies on Pure vellum and trust they will open to your satisfaction. You will note among the Japan vellum books that I have put in a copy of the quarto edition of Swinburne's First Series of Poems and Ballads which I beg you will accept with my compliments and with the explanation that it is not necessarily a part of the Quarto Series as far as your collection goes it being a reprint of the "Laus Veneris" of 1899—the text only and not the other matter which was given for the first and last time in my 1899 volume. If you turn to the short preface you will see the necessity of my printing this book, but not with a view of making those who already had the "Laus Veneris" volume purchasing it over again.

There is one other point to which I would call your attention and that is a copy of "Tristram of Lyonesse" on Pure Vellum of which four copies were done with special title-page and colophon—and consists of the text of the poem only. At the time I did this I had in mind two customers who very much desired to purchase something of mine on Pure Vellum, but after having printed it I felt that you should at least be consulted in the matter and if you desired to purchase the volume rather than offer it to any one else. Of course as you already have the "Tristram and Other Poems" in the Quarto Series it is possible you may not want this, but on the other hand you may consider as I do it is in reality a special volume. If you will kindly let me know your desire and return this book if you do not want it I shall be quite satisfied or if you choose to keep it I shall be very glad to have you do so. I have not as yet written Mrs. Cowdin in regard to this particular volume nor have I sent her a copy thinking perhaps your decision in the matter would probably govern her's, and if you decide to keep it I could send on her's and if you do not keep it there would be no need of writing her concerning the same.

You now have all the facts in connection with every book I have published, and awaiting your decision in regard to the "Tristram", I am,

Very truly yours,

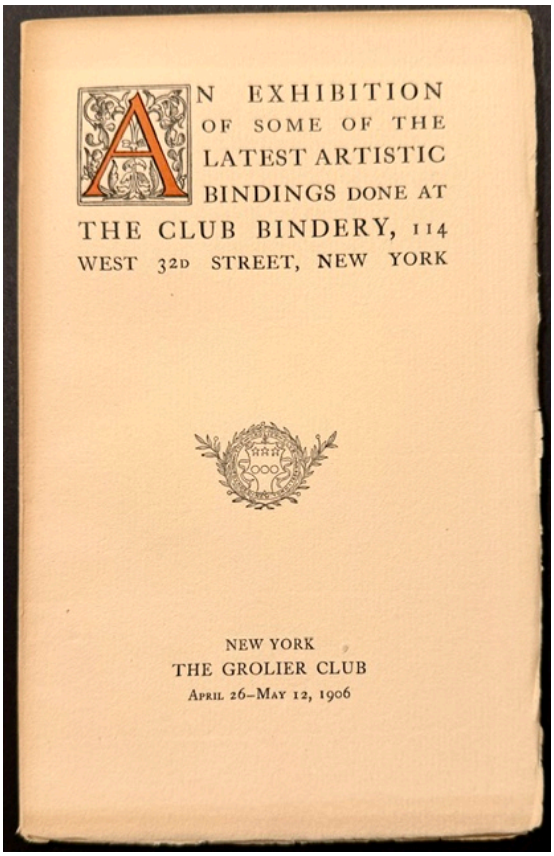
T B Mosher

Editor's note: For the record, the special copy of *Tristram of Lyonesse* Mosher discusses (that's the separate vellum printing containing only the signature poem "Tristram of Lyonesse") was indeed accepted by Henry Poor as it shows up in Poor's auction catalogue.

So over the years, especially up to 1906, Mosher and his important Grolier-colleague customer shared many fine times. Their relationship was based not only on commerce, but in the shared love for "the book" as both a conveyer of literary merit and as an objet d'art. Poor kept adding one of his leather bookplates, purchase after purchase, special binding after binding. They were on a roll. Even The Grolier Club held an exhibition of book bindings done by its namesake bindery—the Club Bindery which can't help but highlight the connection between the two men.



One of Poor's many bookplates with motto "Pauper non in spe" (Not poor in hope)


AN EXHIBITION
OF SOME OF THE
LATEST ARTISTIC
BINDINGS DONE AT
THE CLUB BINDERY, 114
WEST 32D STREET, NEW YORK

NEW YORK
THE GROLIER CLUB
APRIL 26–MAY 12, 1906

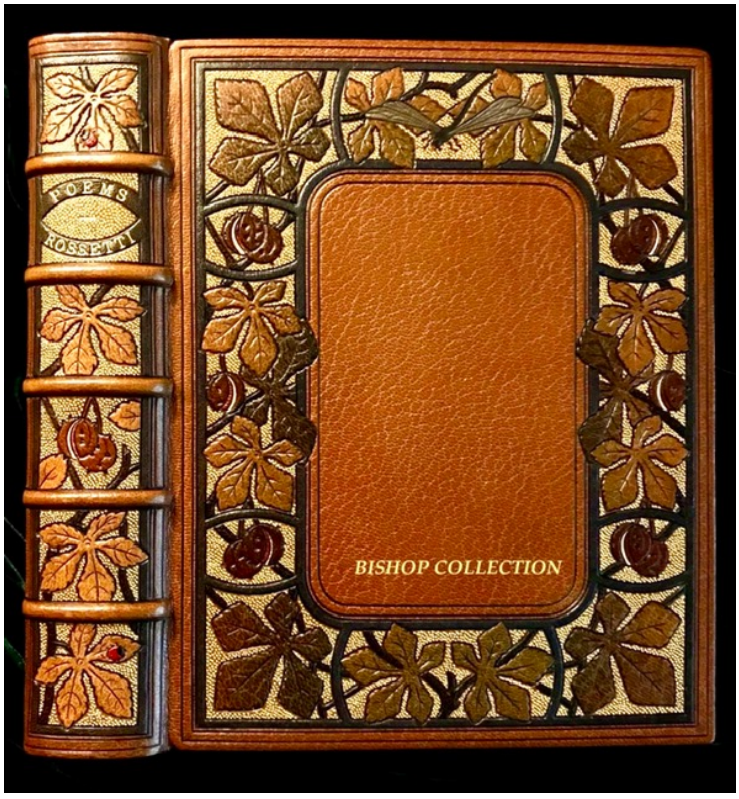
In 1906 the Grolier Club held "AN EXHIBITION OF SOME OF THE LATEST ARTISTIC BINDINGS DONE AT THE CLUB BINDERY." The Club Bindery was set up by a select few members of the Grolier Club to bind their most precious books following the finest standards of European binderies. Eight of the one-hundred thirty eight bindings exhibited (just imagine, 138 Club bindings!) were on Mosher imprints-**more than any other American publisher represented at the exhibition**. Most of these Moshers-in-bindings were very limited editions (ten or fewer), five printed on Roman vellum, and belonged to Henry William Poor:

#20 Bridges, Robert. *The Growth of Love* (1894)
#47 Fitzgerald, Edward. *Polonius* (1901)
#91 Meredith, George. *Modern Love* (1891)
#97 Morris, William. *The Pilgrims of Hope* (1901)
#103 Pater, Walter *Marius the Epicurean* (2v, 1900)
#115 Rossetti, Dante G. *Poems* 1902)
#122 Swinburne, A. C. *Songs before Sunrise* (1901)
#125 Thomson, James. *City of Dreadful Night* (1892)

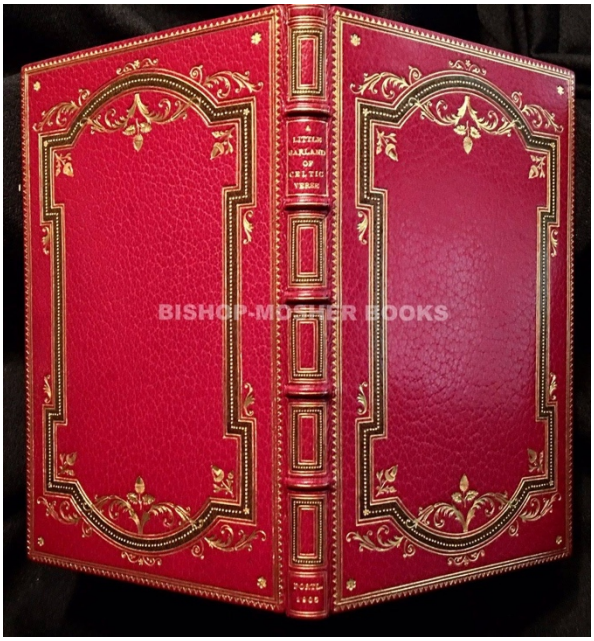
In particular, I wish to draw the reader's attention to the Rossetti piece listed above which is now in the Bishop Collection. The full entry reads:

115 **Rossetti, Dante Gabriel.**
Poems. Portland, Maine, 1902.
8vo, light brown levant morocco, doubled with the same in a lighter shade, sides decorated with a wide pointillé border, outlined by blind-tooled filets, leaving a plain centre panel; the border is inlaid with bands of old blue, branches of conventionalized horse-chestnuts, and insects; so treated as to leave the decoration in relief.

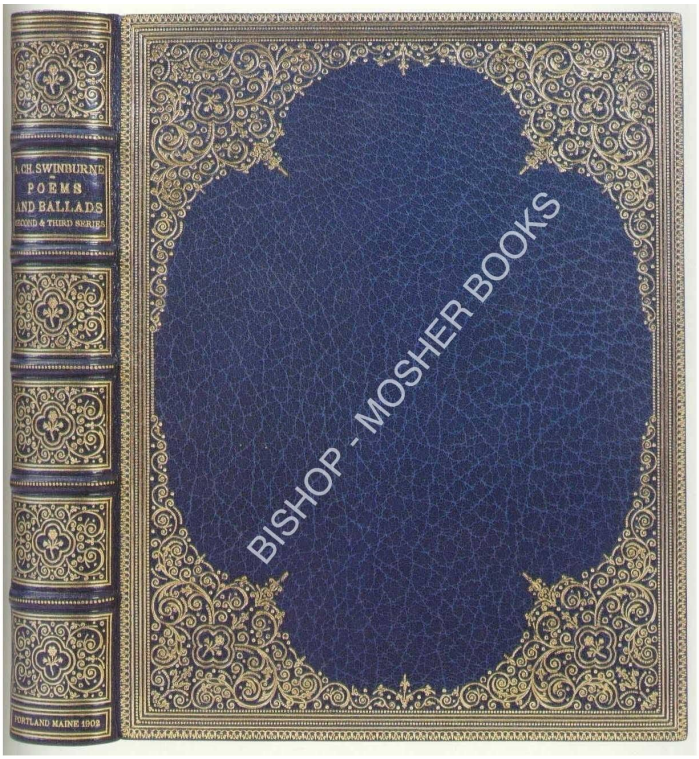
No. 2 of four copies on vellum.



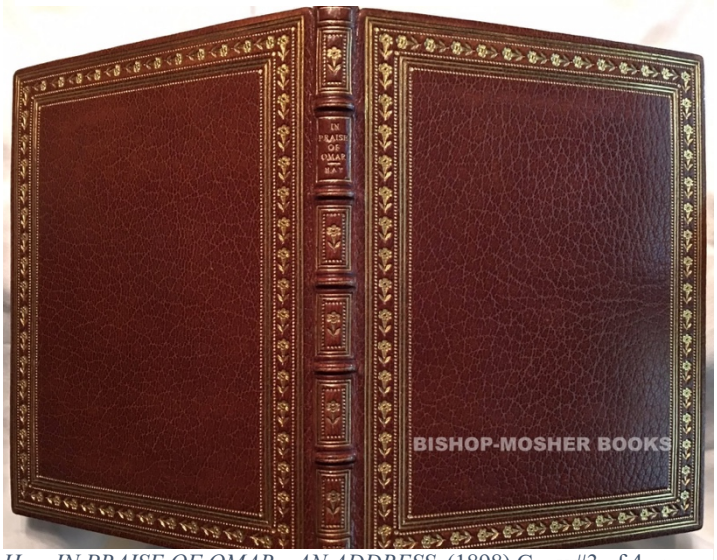
In addition to the above Rossetti's *Poems*, the Bishop Collection has a number of Mosher books from Poor's library printed on Japan vellum, but foremost in the collection with Poor's bookplate, there are four more bindings from The Club Bindery all on highly limited pure vellum printings, and three bound in the original publisher's flexible vellum with ties. These represent the finest quality and the most outstanding craftsmanship one could hope for.



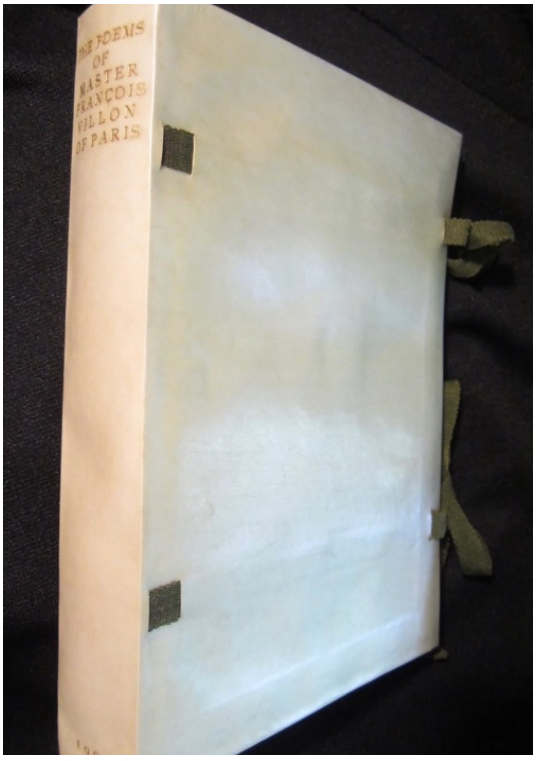
LITTLE GARLAND OF CELTIC VERSE (1905) Copy #2 of 10 on vellum. The Club Bindery.



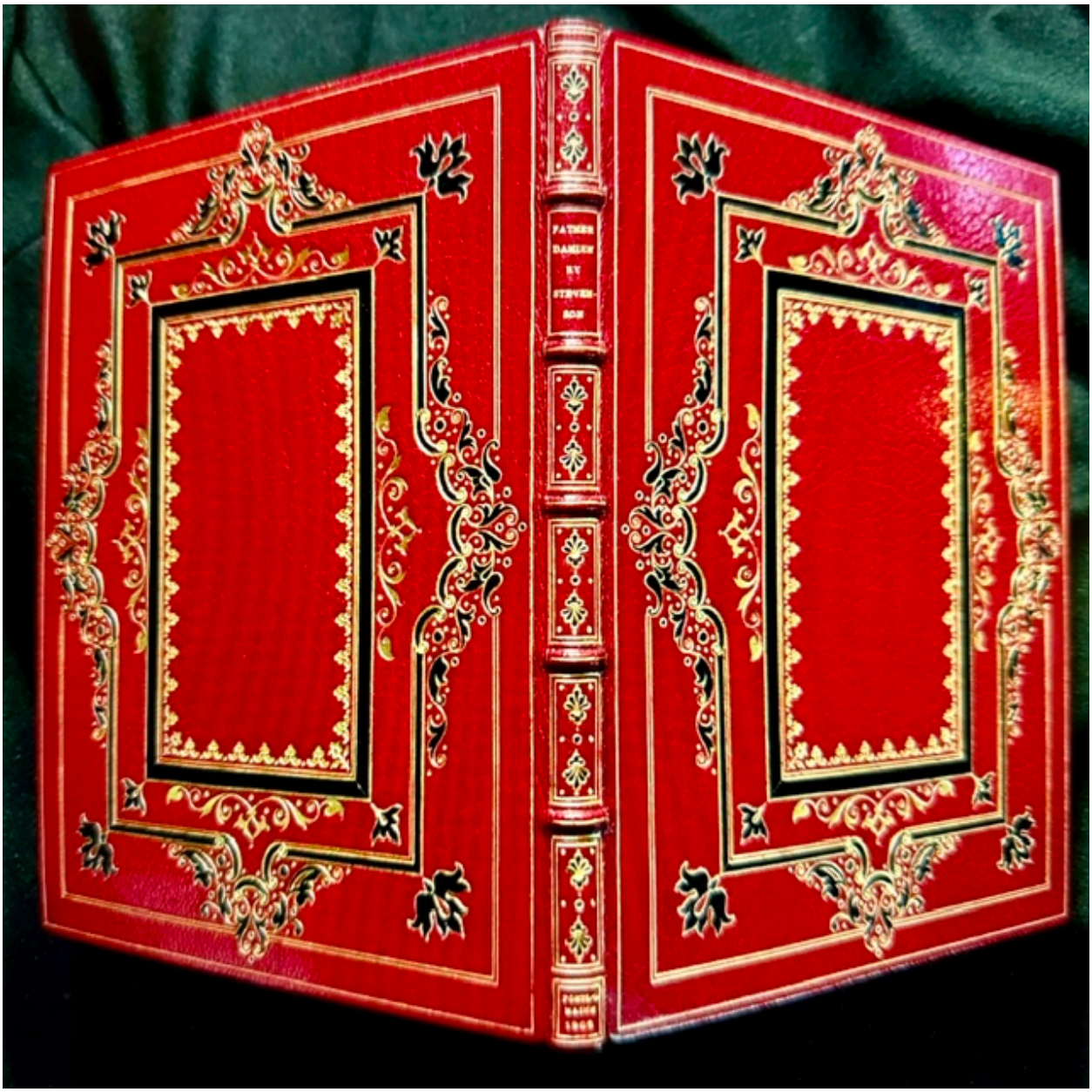
Swinburne's *POEMS & BALLADS* (1902) Copy #2 of 4 on vellum. The Club Bindery.



Hay. IN PRAISE OF OMAR—AN ADDRESS. (1898) Copy #3 of 4 on vellum. The Club Bindery



Payne (trans.) THE POEMS OF MASTER FRANCOIS VILLON OF PARIS (1900) Copy #2 of 4 on vellum. Publisher's vellum binding with ties.



Stevenson. *FATHER DAMIEN* (1905). Copy #2 of 4 on vellum. The Club Bindery.

It doesn't take much research to realize that Mosher had corralled one of the great book collectors of The Gilded Age. The money was there, the mutual interest in literature was there, the Grolier Club connection was there. It all was almost too perfect, that is, until the money end of things began to unravel. Apparently in 1907 the financial troubles for Poor were building steam and during the slump in stock in March 1907 it was reported that Poor's business concerns were hard hit, but in 1908 the whole banking and trade empire was falling apart. *The New York Times* for December 27, 1908 headlined "HENRY W. POOR FAILS; LOSS OVER A MILLION" and

further qualifies that "Little Left of the Broker and Publisher's Once Large Fortune. / MERGERS DIDN'T SUCCEED / He is Said to Have Lost Heavily In the Failure of His Sugar and Ice Investments." Lost heavily was perhaps an understatement, and beginning November 1908 he had to liquidate his much glorified library, the contents of which were his pride and joy. His other



House of Mr. Henry W. Poor. THE LIBRARY. Architects, McKim, Mead & White.

personal belongings, including his artistic furnishings and interior decorations (most of which was sold to Poor by Sanford White, decorator in opulence and dealer in antiquities) were sold in 1909 through the American Art Association.

Now to revisit the entry by Donald Dickinson in his *Dictionary of American Book Collectors*:

> [*continued from page one*] In 1908, when Poor's financial structure collapsed, Arthur Swann of the Anderson Auction Company prepared a sumptuous sale catalogue calculated to pull large bids out of sensitive buyers. The plan worked and the sale was a success. Walter T. Wallace bought some of the English literature, but a new collector, Henry E. Huntington, took away most of the prizes. With the irrepressible George D. Smith leading the way, Huntington managed to capture almost one-third of the Poor library. For Poor this was the end, but for Huntington it was just the beginning.

That sumptuous sale catalogue which Dickinson mentions was produced in five parts which he briefly cites in the entry's beginning, but here further expanded: **Part I** was Nov. 17-19, 1908 with 1,045 lots; **Part II** was Dec. 7-9, 1908 with 1,045 lots; **Part III** was Jan. 12-14, 1909 with 1,015 lots, **Part IV** was April 5-7, 1909 with 1,064 lots, and lastly Part V held in April 5-7, 1909 with 1,254 lots. Fifteen days covering 5,423 lots, bringing in a total of roughly $300,000! Of course it wasn't what the famed Robert Hoe's library realized at auction in 1911/12 of around 15,000 lots

for a grand total of $1,932,056, but nevertheless, Poor's forced liquidation was still substantial, and it was with Poor's library and collecting that Thomas Bird Mosher was associated, and it was Poor's library for which many volumes were bound for him by The Club Bindery which itself folded in 1909. This was certainly an ignominious ending for the Henry William Poor who prided himself on the importance of his personal library and its collections. A broken man, no longer living among his treasures, his last year as a member of The Grolier Club was 1909. Likewise, the last two vellum books he bought from Mosher were *A Little Book of XXIV Carols* by Katherine Tynan (one of five on vellum) and Ernest Dowson's *Cynara; a Little Book of Verse* (again, one of five on vellum), both issued in 1907. Along with Poor now out of the picture, Mosher only issued two more of his published books printed on vellum: *Memories of President Lincoln* chosen from Walt Whitman's writings (1912) and *Songs of Adieu* (1913), this last being a fitting title for the publisher's coming to the end of the line for vellum issues.* The rest of this story is concerned with that title *Memories of President Lincoln* issued by Mosher, in particular the book I recently purchased inscribed by Mosher which was the impetus and occasion for this essay.

By 1912 Henry Poor was no longer in the game. His library lost. His home furnishings and antiques gone. After all his belonging were liquified to satisfy creditors, the Poor mansion near Gramercy Park was sold and demolished in 1910, and Poor reportedly moved to 777 Madison Avenue (45 East 66th St.) in New York where he lived out his days until his death on April 13, 1915. By 1912 even Poor's wife had to liquidate her own holdings to pay off creditors. Life had taken a depressing downturn in their lives. Poor could no longer acquire books as he customarily did before 1907. No more splendid binding to be commissioned and fondled in the confines of the private library open to his beckoned call at any time of day or night. No more vellum printings to be ordered and admired as only one in the rarefied wealth of the upper echelon of book collecting allowed. No more social clubs in New York. Whatever funds there were went to basic food, clothing and lodging, perhaps not as spartan as that which had to be endured by the man in the street, but still confining with the ever present sense of loss of a past bibliophilic life and supporter of the arts. Of course Mosher would go on with his publishing program, even enhancing his offerings by publishing one of his best books ever produced.

In September 1912 Mosher published a grouping of four poems on Lincoln which were selected from Walt Whitman's works. Mosher "wrote" the Foreword which included a closing of an address on Lincoln delivered by Frederick W. Lehman in 1908, and a quote from Mosher's friend, Horace Traubel, one of Whitman's disciples and close friend to Mosher as well. The Foreword, though, is at least to me undetermined as to whether it's coming from Mosher or from Traubel, even though the Foreword is signed T.B.M. (Thomas Bird Mosher). It reads, at least in part, like Traubel. The book's size (ca. 12" x 9") and layout is decidedly larger than usual for a Mosher book—even those of his Miscellaneous Series which themselves took on a wide variety of shapes and sizes, and only the 1905 *Kasidah* was larger. A strikingly wonderful Lincoln photograph was used as a frontispiece launching a volume whose ornamentation includes a lovely Morrisian capital letter (used on the Kelmscott *Defence of Guenevere*) on the title page. The other designs are a mixture of Housman or Goudy pieces, and one head-band of the Whittingham/ Chiswick Press style.

*There was only one more book, Cicero's *De Amicitia* (On Friendship) which Mosher printed, but it was not one of his publications offered to the public. It was a privately printed book done for Edward A. Woods of Sewickley, PA who every year had a book printed for his insurance clients, colleagues, and friends. In this instance 450 copies were printed on Van Gelder paper, 50 copies on Japan vellum paper, and only one copy on Roman vellum. It was the last of any vellum printings and is currently housed in the Bishop Collection.

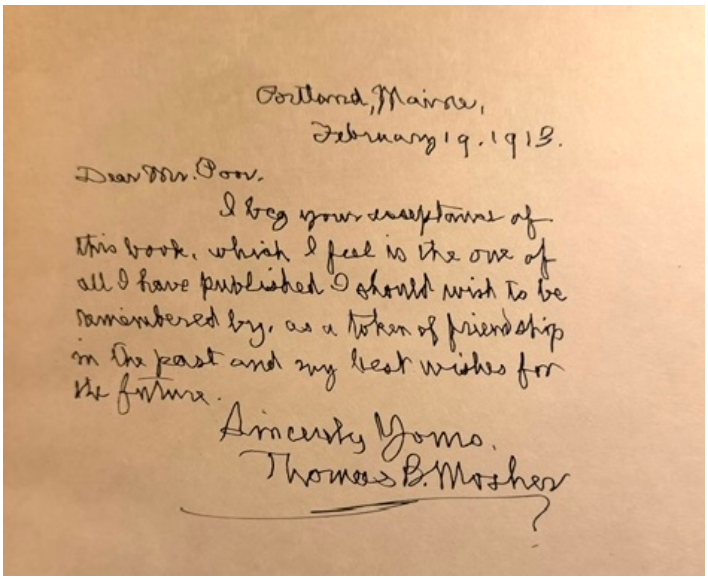
There are unusually shaped drop-caps in green in the Japan vellum and vellum printings which differ from the regular Italian paper copies. All in all it's a very lovely work of printing and publication. The 1912 Mosher catalogue mentions "taken as a whole this may be considered one of Mr. Mosher's choicest productions." The great modern collector, Norman Strouse called it "an outstanding piece of fine printing…"

Poor most certainly had to refrain from buying more books, or more likely was not able to purchase anything outstanding—perhaps not even a Japan vellum Mosher book, much less a pure vellum copy. What I managed to acquire is the outstanding Mosher book, *MEMORIES OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN* (Mosher, 1912) lovingly inscribed by Mosher in 1913 to his once famed client and friend. As a reflection from the past, a Japan vellum copy (#9/50 albeit not Poor's customary "copy #2) of this book arrived at Henry William Poor's doorstep mid-February 1913:

Portland, Maine
February 19, 1913

Dear Mr. Poor,
I beg your acceptance of
this book, which I feel is the one of
all I have published I should wish to be
remembered by, as a token of friendship
in the past and my best wishes for
the future.

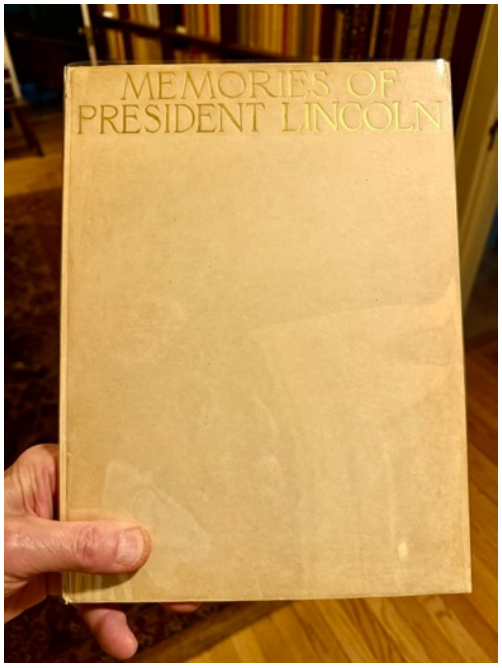
Sincerely Yours,
Thomas B. Mosher

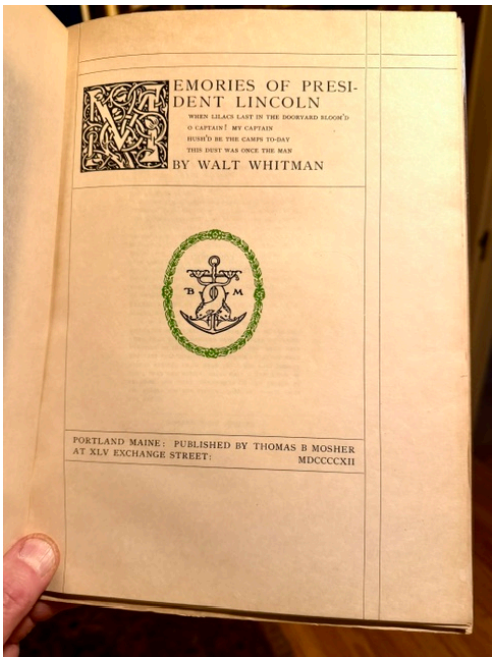

Portland, Maine,
February 19. 1913.

Dear Mr. Poor.

I beg your acceptance of this book, which I feel is the one of all I have published I should wish to be remembered by, as a token of friendship in the past and my best wishes for the future.

Sincerely Yours.
Thomas B. Mosher



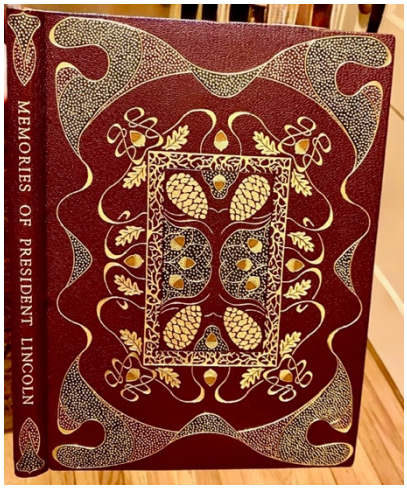

MEMORIES OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN
WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOM'D
O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN
HUSH'D BE THE CAMPS TO-DAY
THIS DUST WAS ONCE THE MAN
BY WALT WHITMAN

PORTLAND MAINE: PUBLISHED BY THOMAS B MOSHER
AT XLV EXCHANGE STREET:
MDCCCCXII

The book would *not* display one of Poor's customary bookplates affixed to the inside of the front cover; after all, there was no library to show where the book was kept nor need to indicate its mark of distinguished ownership. That time was past. In just a little over two years after Mosher's inscription Henry William Poor would be dead and Mosher too would follow in a little over 8 years, but not before bringing out three more large impressive volumes including the Edward Calvert's *Ten Spiritual Designs* (1913), another large *Kasidah* by Richard Burton in 1915 (slightly smaller than his 1905 version), and the monumental facsimile production of the first edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in 1919. So with all these choices in mind, would Mosher have continued to favor only the *Memories of President Lincoln* as *the* book for which he'd most want to be remembered. I suspect his selection would no longer be just one title but would be extended to include one or all of the following: (1) the first ever facsimile of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, (1919) but some of my colleagues say it should be (2) Edward Calvert's *Ten Spiritual Designs enlarged from Proofs of the Originals on Copper, Wood, and Stone MDCCCXXVII-MDCCCXXXI* (1913) which Jerry Kelly, Martin Hutner, David Godine and other members of The Grolier Club identified as one of a hundred books selected as being the most outstanding pieces of typography and book making over the Twentieth Century in their *A Century for the Century--Fine Printed Books from 1900 to 1999*. (NY, The Grolier Club & David R. Godine, 2004—revised edition). Their selection, No. 8 in the exhibition, indicated "In many ways, Thomas Bird Mosher (1852-1923) stands alone in the history of American printing and publishing" and the Calvert "is an example of Mosher's work at its best." (p. XXXIII).

The 1912 *Memories of President Lincoln* would be *the only one* of these lager format volumes additionally issued in the rare pure vellum format. The Bishop Collection has two copies of this imprint on vellum, one of which is now in a commissioned fine artistic binding by Samuel Feinstein of Chicago, and the William F. Gable copy #3 of 10 with Mosher's full-page inscription of December 20, 1912 to Gable:

> "*My dear Gable, I feel much flattered that you should decide upon owning a copy of the greatest poem by the greatest poet upon the greatest American that ever lived. To have my name associated with theirs, as publisher only, is to my mind the most covetable thing I have done, or may ever hope to do in the years, few or many, remaining to me. Ever your friend, Thomas Bird Mosher.*"



Feinstein binding, copy #7 of 10

Mosher himself described the vellum printing of *Memories* as a choice book "that princes may compete for but only Huntingtons can buy." (Mosher to W. Irving Way, TLS, July 15, 1914). Indeed, and surely if Henry William Poor had still been in the game, copy #2 or #3 would have been his. Alas, Poor was only able to receive an inscribed copy of the Japan vellum edition, and that as a gift 'to a fallen star.' In a way we could say that someone like William F. Gable represented Poor's "stand-in" as a collector/friend able to afford the rarest and sumptuous printing issued from The Mosher Press. I'm honored to have both inscribed copies in the collection, even though one comes with a great deal of sorrow.

PRB
July 28, 2026