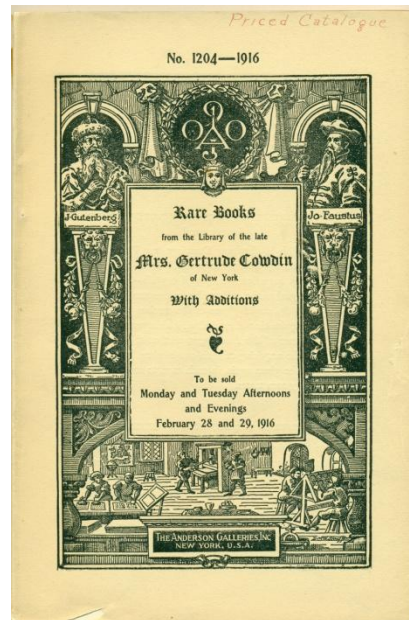


The Cowdin Catalogue

Most recently a colleague friend of mine, Thomas G. Boss, sent me a copy of the following Anderson Galleries sale catalogue which goes to show one how important old sales catalogues can be when it comes to provenance or uncovering facts that had fallen by the wayside years ago. The catalogue's title is:

Rare Books from the Library of the late Mrs. Gertrude Cowdin of New York... to be sold Monday and Tuesday Afternoons and Evenings -- February 28 and 29, 1916.

What a treat. I have never seen it before, and of course, this is the same Gertrude Cowdin who had Mosher privately print fifteen "Roman vellum" copies of George Parsons Lathrop's *The Casket of Opals* (Bishop 56) in May 1900. It's an outstanding treasure trove of information on bindings which I own but never knew who commissioned them.



Actually on August 10, 2010 I received a package from Tom Boss with two valuable enclosures: a Wilsey Books catalogue in which the photo illustration of the *Adelphi of Terrence* in a Chiswick Art Guild binding which is RIGHT ON TARGET in showing a binding much like the Acorn & Oak Leaf

binding I wrote about in the September 2010 issue of *Endpapers*, and its image conforms with my most recent investigations leading me to Beatrice Lucking of the Chiswick Art Guild or someone strongly influenced by her.

As for the Cowdin catalogue (without the back cover but who cares), I'm very pleased to add it to the Bishop Collection. Here are some of the amazing outcomes upon close inspection:

1. Cowdin collected 46 of the Mosher books printed on vellum. Gads, I had no idea she was a major Mosher vellum collector although it now seems obvious given that she commissioned Mosher to print her fifteen copies of *The Casket of Opals*, one of which is in the Bishop Collection along with a letter of presentation from Cowdin. Will I ever surpass her achievement? I rather doubt it, but then again I wasn't a

contemporary of Mosher and couldn't buy from him direct as she could. A few titles were duplicates and she lacked the last two that Mosher produced: the large *Memories of President Lincoln* (1912) which I have, and the very small *Songs of Adieu* (1913) which is an enchanting item. The February 1916 sale of the late Mrs. Gertrude Cowdin suggests she died prior to the sale, and since she religiously collected all the Mosher books on "pure vellum" except for those produced in 1912 and 1913, I'm surmising that she must have either been too ill, or died sometime prior to or in 1912. I haven't been able to track down anything about her birth and death dates. One would have thought it would have showed up in the *New York Times*, but I don't seem to be able to find it.

2. She had 38 of her individual collected titles put into Toof bindings by Otto Zahn, four of which were on Mosher books printed on vellum (one was actually two volumes bound in one). In addition, she had a ten volume set bound by Toof, and there were three more bindings listed as Zahn bindings (Zahn Bindery?, or just with Zahn's name stamped in the book?) which when added to the figure above brings the total number of Zahn bindings up to 41 single volumes bound in Toof bindings.

3. As for those four "pure vellum" Mosher books in Toof bindings, two (actually three if you count one which is two volumes bound into one--I know, it gets confusing) were of outstanding interest:

(3a) *The Germ* (Mosher, 1898, one of four copies) is described as in full crushed green levant, richly tooled in gilt with design of grapes and vine-leaves on back and sides, flowered inside borders, doublures of crushed brown levant, with monogram "DG" in center, by Toof, with slip case of crown morocco. With this information I have sort of completed my search for all four vellum copies in that I now know one was bound by the Club Bindery (H. William Poor's copy), one by Toof (Cowdin's copy), one by Leonard Mountenay (now in Bishop Collection but it's still remains uncertain as to who commissioned it), and one which remained unbound when Dick Fredeman saw it years ago at The Strand Bookstore and which had to be Mosher's own copy because his was not in any special binding. Of course someone may have bound it since then, but this sort of rounds out the account although more enlightening information is always sought.

(3b) The second one--which Tom Boss must have missed when looking over the catalogue or else he certainly would have pointed it out--is this:

354. PATER (WALTER). *Marius the Epicurean, his Sensations and Ideas*. Portrait. Square 8vo, full lavender crushed levant morocco,

elaborately tooled with a conventional floral design and line borders, gilt inside border, with doublure and end leaves of similar colored watered silk, gilt top, uncut, in an autumn leaf morocco case, by Toof.

Portland: Me.: Thos. B. Mosher, 1900

* One of 4 copies printed on vellum, signed by the publisher.

I own this spectacular binding and it was sold to me by Thomas G. Boss years ago when I still worked for the then ABAA member, Antonio Raimo, in Columbia, PA. Now, at long last, I know that not only was it pictured in Zahn's exhibition monograph *On Art Binding*, but it was first bought, indeed most likely commissioned by, Gertrude Cowdin. This is such splendid information, all from this one little auction catalogue. But there's more!

4. There was another Toof binding in the sale that is now in the Bishop Collection: a copy of *The Bibelot* for 1897 (3rd vol., Cowdin item #41) printed on Japan vellum, and quite possibly yet another item #437, RLS's *Father Damien*, in full buff levant morocco, gilt top, one of 50 on Japan vellum). I hesitate because mine certainly seems to fit but the cataloguer's don't describe any tooling.

5. I do not think Cowdin's copy of Lathrop's *The Casket* (1/10 on vellum in Toof binding, #233)--once owned by Norman Strouse and now at the University of San Francisco--was one and the same. They don't indicate it's in a Toof binding and the description doesn't match. However, I do know that item #553 in the Cowdin catalogue, *Wine, Women, and Song* (1899), is the same binding that Zahn exhibited and for which he won the first place prize at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo. Nice book, and now located at the Philadelphia Free Library.

6. But wait, I found yet another binding in the Bishop Collection which was done for Gertrude Cowdin:

142. FIELD (MICHAEL). *Underneath the Bough. A Book of Verses*. Narrow 12mo, full light green crushed morocco, gilt center ornaments, with dragon flies. Floral endpapers, gilt top, by Toof. Portland: Mosher, 1898

*One of a limited issue printed on Japan paper.

The dragon flies make this an unmistakable hit.

I could give the tally of the number of lots including Mosher books -- they were all either printed on Japan vellum or "pure vellum"-- but this is probably enough to say that I'm very pleased with what was revealed in the Cowdin catalogue—a rarity in and of itself. Receiving this hitherto unseen Anderson catalogue made my day, my week, heck even my month, and I didn't even have to buy a Mosher book to have

it so made. It was a delight to go through that catalogue and I've now added it to the comparative list of owners of Mosher books printed on vellum which I diligently keep and will some day have published.

So remember, seek out old auction catalogues that relate to your field of interest. You may just identify new descriptive information or information on provenance.

Philip R. Bishop
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